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VOL. V.

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BY
JOSEPH PARKER, D.D.,
Minister of the City Temple, London.

IN SIX VOLUMES.

VOL. V.

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STUDIES IN TEXTS.

I.

GOD REASONING WITH MAN.

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord."—
ISA. i. 18.

(Report of a discourse delivered in Exeter Hall.)

YOU will see from the terms of the text that Christian teachers are empowered to make unto all whom it may concern perhaps the noblest and most gracious proposition which even God himself ever offered for the acceptance of mankind. Looked at in this light, the words are peculiarly pathetic and impressive. As a piece of literature they are very beautiful; as conveying a religious invitation they are infinitely pathetic. I pray that they may be altogether irresistible! This text strikes at the root of the wicked notion that man is under an arbitrary government; that is to say, that man is a mere slave, or a mere machine, and that he is controlled apart from principles that are moral. In the text, man is addressed almost as the equal of the Almighty. It is, "Come now, let us reason together." Why, it is, so far as its terms are concerned, precisely such a proposition as one man might make to another. It seems as if all majesty had been laid aside on the one part, as if

all disqualification had been forgotten upon the other, by the maker of the proposition, and that the two parties were to meet on something like equal terms. See how God honours man; and in honouring man doth he not truly honour himself? For who kindled the flame of intellectual light in the understanding of man, and who taught man the music of divine speech? Understand that Almighty God sees in us, whatever we may see in ourselves, the possibility of great life, the possibility of great and good things. He comes in quest of these very elements when he thus addresses his alien child.

I wish you, too, to look at the text as marking decided progress in the moral position of mankind. There was a time, if I read the holy and inspired Revelation aright, when such words were not used by the Almighty. I turn over the foregoing pages of the volume and find the Maker and creature standing in this relation: God drove out the man from Eden, and set a flaming sword in the garden, where man had wont to be. It appears as if God himself had turned away, turned his back upon his child, and left the sinner to wander in outer darkness, to feel the bitterness and pain of his rebellion. There is no proposition at that time to reason out the case. There is a voice of thundering and of judgment, and afterwards there is a silence more terrible than the roar of the thunder and the scream of the tempest! It is as if God had retired into the depths of infinite space, shut himself up in the chambers of his own eternity, and refused to have any further communication with the creature who had disobeyed his will. And yet, though it may seem to be so, there was under all the apparent withdrawal and terribleness of judgment and indignation the spirit of mercy and the spirit of hope towards man. For the

gospel is not a new invention. The gospel does not come up at any particular time and say, "I am the expression of God's mind to-day ; I am a new thing on the earth ; I make a new appeal to the understanding and the heart of man." The gospel is as old as God, ancient as eternity ; and as for the Cross of Christ, it was built before the foundations of the rocks were laid ! Yet there was a time when God seemed to be filled with anger, holy and just, in relation to his child, who had rebelled against him. But now, having read this beautiful text, it seems as if a new order of things had been set in motion—as if God, having, as it were, recovered from the shock which his child's sin gave him, had come out of his hiding-place, willing to give the rebel a chance to speak for himself, to state his own case with all the energy of his wit and with all the force of his eloquence.

I propose to look at this invitation in some of its aspects, and to endeavour to find out its meaning. I have to ask you, then, this favour at the outset—to listen to me as a Christian teacher who is empowered to make the most gracious and the most noble proposition, in the name of God, which ever was laid before any assembly of men and women. What, then, do these words teach ? What is their spirit ? and what is their purpose ? and what do they mean in relation to ourselves ? I am not prepared now to separate the audience into the good and the bad, nor am I going to address the bad alone. My brethren, we are all bad ! The preacher and the hearer both are bad. There are degrees as between ourselves. Some are good, some are better, some are evil altogether, as these terms go in human speech and as they are used merely for the sake of convenience. But in the sight of God, in the presence of his infinite holiness, and in relation to the

law of God, "there is none righteous ; no, not one." And as for the chief of saints, he will be loudest in declaring that he is also chief of sinners. I propose, therefore, being one of yourselves and but a mere instrument for the occasion, to speak this proposition as if addressed to the heart of every one before me ; and I have this to ask : " What answer are we prepared to make to this gracious offer ? " " Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord." The proposition comes from God. It does not arise from the human side at all. It is a piece of pure condescension on the part of the Almighty himself. Please to remember that. Grace comes out of the sovereignty of God. The possibility of salvation comes from God's grace. It is not in any wise of our conception or of our own doing. We are saved by faith, and that not of ourselves, for faith is the gift of God. God, having made this proposition, proceeds upon the assumption that he knows himself to be right in this case. It is precisely so in our own affairs, in the common controversies of the day. The man who knows himself to be in the right, who feels himself to have a just cause in hand, is always the first to make the noblest propositions, and to offer as many concessions as are possible without impairing the law of absolute right, truth, and propriety. We know this to be a custom amongst ourselves. The great man is always the first to make propositions of conciliation. The great and noble nature is always the first to say, "Come, let us see how this thing, after all, can be made up." It is, generally speaking, even amongst ourselves, the man who has injured us that holds his spite so long ; the man who has done us wrong that seeks to do us still further injury, in order, in some way, to justify himself to himself, as also to society. But the man who is offended, justly offended, is the first to say, "I bear no malice, I seek

for no ordinary or paltry retribution, I shall find no satisfaction in seeing you humbled and disgraced. Come now, let us discuss the matter in all its bearings, set it in its various lights, and see what it really means ; and if it be possible to restore harmony, let harmony be restored." If amongst ourselves we do so, it is in an infinitely higher degree true in the case of Almighty God. He makes the proposition to his rebel. After man has committed high treason against his throne and court, after he has done his best to snap the divine sceptre and insult the divine honour, after he has made himself a disgrace in creation, God says to him, not, "I will cut thee in twain with my glittering sword ; I will put my foot upon thee and crush thee into the dust, and defy thee to get thy life again" ; but he says, "Come now, let us reason together." This proposition is not only the proof of the grace of God, but that grace itself is the vindication of his righteousness. He knows he is right, and he knows he is right in the court of reason ; that if the case be honestly and fully stated the criminal will convict himself, he will burn with shame, and cry out for the judgment that is just. My friends, I make no hesitation about this matter. God is right, and we are wrong in this controversy. We are not wrong partially, not wrong here and there, with little spots of light and blue between the errors, but we are wrong altogether—fouly, shamefully, infamously wrong ! And unless every man shall see that and feel it as a poisoning sting in his nature, he will never come in a right state of mind to consider the propositions of the Cross or the offers of divine grace.

Yet God, knowing this, asks us to reason the case with him : showing us, in the next place, that God proceeds upon the assumption that man ought to be prepared to

vindicate his conduct by reasons,—that a man's conduct ought not to be a haphazard thing, but ought to have under it a basis of reasoning, of moral unity, and of understanding of the right relations of affairs. A man ought to be able to say why he does this and why he refrains from doing that: he ought not to be living from hand to mouth, just doing what happens to come up first, without knowing why he does it. He ought to be able to say, "I will not drink of that cistern"; he ought also to be able to give his reasons for avoiding it. He ought to be able at the end of every day to vindicate to himself, to his own understanding and self-respect, the course he has proceeded upon in business or otherwise during the whole day. Is this not right? God says, "Why do you do this? Let me know your reasons for having done so. Will you state your case to me? I give you the opportunity of stating your own case in your own terms." Observe how wonderfully influential, when rightly accepted, is a proposition of this kind. If men would think more they would sin less. "Oh that men were wise, that they would consider!" If a man, before doing questionable actions, would carefully and thoughtfully sit down and examine his reasons for giving up his strength to certain policies, he would in many cases be enabled, on the ground of mere common, human, right reasoning, to avoid offences which stain and disgrace his daily life. Alas! some of us dare not think. We shut our eyes, we take the plunge, and we risk the consequences. God says to us in his gentle mercy, "Don't do so. Before you leap—look; before you put out your hand to touch the object of your ambition, consider what it is, what the taking of it involves; be careful, steady-minded, sober, thoughtful, knowing that he who uses his understanding aright will save himself from many a fall and many a pain." Have you ever tried

this? Have you ever attempted to write out a vindication of any one sin you have ever committed? Take your white card, write at the top of it the sin you propose to commit, whatever it be; shut yourself up in solitude; write in some characters that nobody but yourself can decipher, and put down under your sin the reasons why you propose to commit it, and put down every possible excuse you can. Reason yourself into it, and you will fail to do so if you be just to the first principles of human understanding and to the first elements of common sense. And God asks you to do this; to reason the case out. He will not allow us to live our life in a passion, in a thoughtless hurry, to do things in a confused and hasty manner. He imposes upon us this simple obligation: "Stand still; think about it; reason it out; see what you mean; and do not do it till you know the whole scope and consequences of the act." He proposes more than this in the text. He comes to the man who has actually taken the plunge, who has really done the evil deed, who has absolutely committed himself to the devil, who wears the very livery of the pit, and pronounces the very language of perdition, and he says, "Come now, let us talk this matter over; let us reason together. Make this a special hour in your history; say what you will; be honest to your own judgment and to your own heart; put down your case; state your reasons and your excuses, and let us go into this case thoroughly" Brethren, I am prepared to say this, that no man can vindicate wrong by reason. Every man who has a bad case to defend must in the first place blink his own common sense, insult his own sagacity, and quash his own sense of right, before he can defend himself or defend the evil action of another. That is something to know. That is a bold proposition to make, even in the court of reason—not in the court of

religion, distinctively so called. No man can make out a good case for wrong: he must evade many lines of obligation; he must trifle with the plain and spiritual sense of many terms; he must hurry over many very difficult parts of his case; he must depose his conscience; he must hoodwink his sagacity; and then, perhaps, he may do something confusedly and wickedly in the defence of some questionable action of his life. Shall I ask young men especially to turn this over in their minds; to consider this very soberly and carefully?—*viz.* It is impossible to defend any bad action by good reason. Understand that. You are witty, you are sharp, your power of repartee is unquestionable; but you cannot successfully defend a bad action by good reasoning. Logic is against you as well as theology. Common sense is against you as well as spiritual revelation. This is the strength and the majesty of the Christian faith, that it challenges men by the first principles of reasoning to defend themselves, as sinners, before the Almighty. “Oh that men were wise, that they would consider!” “My people do not know; Israel doth not consider.” If men would take a few quiet hours, now and then, and look at life as it really is, and at themselves as they really are, the hour of thought might become the hour of prayer.

Who is it in the text that invites men to reason with him? It is God! Then the sinner is invited to take his case to the Fountain-head. Do not many persons stumble and err at this very point by a misunderstanding of the terms of the proposition? If I take my evil heart to a human teacher, he can do but little for me except as an instrument. I must hear his ministry, but I must regard him as the echo and not the voice, the second and not the principal, the instrument and not the revealer. If I take

my case to a priest, named by the highest names, still I have done what I ought not to have done if I make that the final point instead of a temporary resting-place. It is God who invites us to state the case directly to himself. Have you ever employed one hour of your life in stating your case in secret to God? I have done so: and oh! the crimson faces I have had—oh! the tottering knees—oh! the pain of self-conviction and all but damnation of self-torture! You know what it is to talk to yourself? Talk to God. Go directly and immediately to him; speak to the Invisible. It does a man good to be apparently speaking to nothing,—speaking into the air, as it were, but with the holy consciousness that God is there, catching every tone and every sigh, every aspiration and every desire! Will you try that experiment of stating your case to the invisible Father—the present but unseen God? You can only do so in solitude. I believe in a man having a place of private resort for the consideration of all the bearings of his life. I have had such places ever since I could remember. I have occasion to go back to them, in recollection, with joy and thanksgiving. Places in far-away quiet fields, where I used to go between school hours and bend my knees behind some blossoming hawthorn hedge, or some old, old tree, and there, as a mere boy in his teens, talk to God till the tears started and life seemed to be going out of me in one great painful shudder. But oh! the sweetness of those hours! One came back even to play and enjoyments of a boyish kind, and work, and suffering, with new life and new hope. God says, “I will condescend to talk the case over with you; I will hear what you have to say; I will understand your case, and listen to your reason.” Go to the Fountain-head, dear sir; take what you can of the advantages of an intermediate

ministry ; hear godly men of every denomination and every type of intellect and method of speech ; go all over your city, hearing the preachers and teachers of Christian truth, and be thankful if any man can utter a tone that touches your heart, or give one gleam of light that penetrates the darkness of your understanding. But don't forget the Fountain-head ! Talk an hour with the servant ; but spend your lifetime with the Master. Have a passing interview with his agents ; but when he throws open his door and says, "Come now ; I am ready ; I wait to be gracious," go to his feet and talk the case out.

From a proposition of this kind what can I infer but that God's purpose is, in making it, to mingle mercy with judgment ? The tone is distinctly that of a merciful and gracious proposition. Such words could not be used without an intention on the part of the speaker to do everything in his power to meet the case of the criminal. Please to understand that. Hear the language and say whether, grammatically and fairly interpreted, it does not imply that God is prepared to make every concession in his power to the sinner. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord." This is a stopping-place on the road to judgment. We are told that God will come to his judgment-throne, and sit upon it, and gather all nations around his feet. But before ascending that solemn elevation he sits down on the throne of reasoning, of conference with his creatures, and says, "I must talk with thee ; I must give thee an opportunity of hearing thyself upon this question, because I know that it is impossible for any man to talk out his reasons for doing wrong without, in the very act, convicting himself ; and such conviction may come to penitence and contrition,

to shame, to broken-heartedness. I therefore propose to all the rebels in my human kingdom, to come to me and to reason their case in my hearing." What does he intend? Does he intend to take advantage of our slips of the tongue? Is he listening to us as a keen and unsparing critic, who will be down upon us if we make one slip in grammar or one misstatement of the case? Is he not rather there partly as our Advocate? If it be possible to speak a word in our favour which we ourselves have forgotten, will he not drop it in as we are going on with the case? He will. Judgment is his strange work, and mercy is his peculiar delight. He therefore asks us to state the case, and his own purpose is to mingle judgment with mercy, and to meet us at the extremest possible points of his own law and righteousness.

There is something to be remembered at this point. If God could trifle with righteousness in making a case up with us, his own throne would be insecure, his own heaven would not be worth having. In taking care of righteousness he is taking care of us. In judging everything upon a basis of absolute, infinite righteousness he is taking care of everything that is good in us, in the universe; he is protecting himself as God and setting a flaming sword around his own throne! Herein do men greatly err. Talking upon religious questions, they say, "Why does not God come down and forgive us all?" That is precisely what God himself wants to do. Only even God cannot forgive until we ourselves want to be forgiven. When we come to him saying, "Lord, have mercy," we shall hardly get our prayer uttered until his great heaven shall become one glorious exhibition of mercy, and shall come down

into our hearts and lives with its light and its beauty ! You make a fundamental mistake if you suppose that God has only to say, " I forgive you all," and thus restore the universe to harmony and order. God cannot say so. If he were to say so, he would be trifling with righteousness, he would be rendering insecure the pillars of his own throne, and the reins of his own government would fall out of his hands. He must be just, he must be righteous. Righteousness must be vindicated, and then grace becomes sure. Righteousness must be satisfied, and then eternity becomes heaven ! The law must be made honourable, then the gospel will be given to us, with the assurance of eternal permanence—but not without.

It is impossible for the Almighty himself to forgive men unless men come to him with contrition, with repentance towards himself, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Believe me, there is no action so difficult as the action of forgiveness. There is no action so complicated as the action of pardon. It seems a very simple thing to say, " I forgive you ; say no more about it ; there is an end of the whole affair : away you go !" He who could speak so is immoral. He who could talk so is not to be trusted. If a man could treat the moral relationships of life so, it would but prove that his conscience had been drugged, that his judgment had been hoodwinked, and that there was nothing morally permanent in the quality of his soul but its corruptness. Get men to understand that thoroughly, and you have begun a great work in their souls. I have heard, in the course of my ministry, again and again, people say that God will be merciful, at the very last he will say, " Ah well, you have lived a bad life, I know, but I forgive you—you may go into heaven." There is nothing so false in

reasoning, so absurd in logic, so corrupt in morals, as vapid, sentimental talk of that kind! What, then, does God propose to do? He proposes this: "Do you feel the sinfulness of sin?" "Yes." "Do you renounce all hope of saving yourself?" "Yes." "Do you know what sin is as sin? Not merely as a social offence, not merely as a national or social crime, but sin as sin; and do you hate it as such?" "I do." Then God says to you, "Take all the grace you need; the Cross is the answer to the pain of your conviction, and the atonement made by my Son is the way, and the only way, and the infinitely sufficient way, to pardon, to purity, and to peace!" Understand, therefore, that this is a result secured by the consent of both parties. I may have offended you. You may come to me and say, "You have deeply grieved me; but I forgive." I can snap my fingers in your face and say, "Take your forgiveness away; I don't want to be forgiven by you!" Observe, therefore, that you have not the power to forgive me. You can forgive the crime, but you cannot forgive the sin. And even your forgiveness of the crime I may resent, and turn into an occasion of inflicting still deeper injury upon you. But if I come to you and say, "I have injured you; I see that I must have given you great pain; I did you wrong, and in my heart I am sorry for having done so"; if then you say, "With my heart I forgive you," the transaction is based on solid moral principles, and the result is likely to be permanent and beneficent. It is so with God. God cannot pass an act of universal amnesty; he cannot open all the prison doors of the universe and say to the criminals, "Come forth, I forgive you all." But if they in their condemned cells would but heave one sigh of penitence, and utter one cry for God's forgiving mercy, every bolt would fall off, every lock fly back, and there

would be no prison in all the universe of God ! Art thou willing to be pardoned ? Hast thou come, from a sense of sin, to know its bitterness, and to feel thy want of something more ? To thee is this gospel preached, " Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

With all this before me I am driven to this conclusion, that now the sinner is left absolutely without excuse. We must now make short, sharp work of this. Trifling and dallying with men there must be none upon this question. Looking at the whole volume of inspired revelation, looking at the person and ministry of God the Son, looking at his sacrifice upon Calvary and at the whole scope and bearing of his mediation, having regard to the gracious proposition made by the Father of light to the children of darkness, that they would come to him and reason their case, I say, " If any man be damned, it is because he will not be saved !" " Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." I cannot escape that conclusion ; and in one aspect it is a glorious conclusion, because it gives us assurance that nothing is lost that would be saved—that God's great arms have been stretched out to the very brink of hell, that he might save the man who was just slipping over ; and that man said, " No !" And when he went down, he went down because he persisted in moral suicide ; and a verdict of suicide must be returned by all the angels of light and all the spirits of just men made perfect ! There is no other verdict. Shall it be pronounced upon us ? But you say, " I have excuses." No ! If you mean by excuses that you can trifle, that you can state a case that has no moral substance in it, I believe you. If you say that you can gloss over your actions, put a little gilding upon the outside of your behaviour, so as to make it look tolerably well, I

say, "I agree with you." But if you say that you can reason out your case, if you have done one bad action in your life, you are stating what you know to be untrue. What! can you defend a bad action? What a wicked genius must be yours! If you ever pressed your finger too heavily upon man, woman, or child who was weak and self-helpless, all your wit and genius and sagacity would be used in vain if you attempted to defend the action on moral principles. I charge you with this. You cannot run up even the canvas court of reason itself alone, and say, "I can sit under this roof and defend myself here." I tear down the court, I tear it to rags; you are a fool in having entered it, and you have doubled your sin by having attempted to vindicate it! This is how I look at the matter. I have taken this opportunity of saying so, frankly, in round, bold terms—first, because it is right to my own judgment and my own consciousness; and secondly, because I believe a statement of this kind, thought about carefully, and examined in quietness and solitude, must end in arresting men in aggravating the sin with which they are always chargeable. Will you reason with God? He invites you to do so. Do you address an invitation to the Almighty to reason with you? You need not address an invitation to him, because his invitation has been issued from the beginning, and is still operative. He—the Divine One—the grieved Father, issues the invitation. How shall we accept it? Simply, heartily, lovingly, thankfully. One hour's reasoning with God may mean a lifetime in eternity of purity and joy. Some of you have already reasoned the case with God, and you can by your experience prove every word I have now said. I know it. When a man speaks the truth he does not speak with one voice. No man can rise in an assembly of his fellows and say one word that

is true without saying it with the trumpet of the ages, with the thunder of universal human experience! I know, therefore, you confirm what I say in its substance, if not in its very letter and method, in your consciences. You will also know that I am speaking wisely and justifiably in exhorting you, as I would exhort myself, every day to reason out all cases with God ; never to talk to people without having an interview with the Father ; never to do anything that even looks doubtful without having a spiritual, loving conference with the Eternal One. It is thus that life is made solid, that every day is touched with infinite beauty, and that life becomes a hope and an assurance of immortality ! Why not surrender at once ? Why not say, "I will lay down my arms here, never to take them up against the divine government again so long as I live !" Why not this assembly rise and say—"We love him because he first loved us ! We find in Jesus Christ the answer to our original sin and to our actual transgression. Our only hope of new life is in the ministry of God the Holy Ghost !" If this could be said by one, there would be joy in the presence of the angels of God. If it could be said by a multitude like this, then heaven itself would be filled with the music of a new joy, and become still more heaven by reason of its ecstatic rapture ! I do not want to preach without results. I do not want to take a course that may merely please you for the moment and be forgotten when you get outside. I wish to say words which will rouse your minds and compel you to consider your lives, and to press men by God's great, great grace to surrender themselves to the Lamb of God, the only Saviour of the world. In making this protestation I ask every Christian that is here to pray that the word thus spoken may be as the sword and the hammer of the Lord !

II.

THE DIVINE WITNESS IN MAN.

"Well, Master, thou hast said the truth."—MARK xii. 32.

(*Delivered in Exeter Hall.*)

EVERY man who is not utterly lost has within him a voice which tells him the difference between truth and error. There is in every one of us a spiritual sense which says, "This is right and that is wrong; this is the way of light and that is the way of darkness." God has not left himself without witness in the human heart. In every one of us there is a sense which instantly distinguishes between the good and the bad. The scribe who spake the words of the text spake out of the fulness of his heart. When he had asked Jesus about the supreme commandment, and had received the Master's reply, instantly he answered, "Thou hast said the truth." I take his answer as setting forth the great and solemn fact that every man carries a monitor in his own heart; that if we would listen more intently and reverently to the voice that is within us, we should often be kept from some sad wanderings into error and darkness. I propose to illustrate this point, and then to say something about the use and abuse of our inward monitor. Let me begin by a reference to some very common and well-known facts, and endeavour to work up my way from things that are familiar to things that are more spiritual and remote. There is a common sense amongst mankind. There are

some things which are universally known to be true, and which, therefore, are universally approved in theory if not in practice and conduct ; things which are not certified by a man here and a man there, but which are instantly and universally approved by all persons who are within the circle of civilisation and intelligence. “ There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding ” ; so that upon certain great lines of judgment we are all one. We know one another to be brethren and friends and counsellors, worthy of each other’s confidence, because there are certain great points which are universally undoubted, which are accepted and laid down as the very basis of our practical life.

For example, if you saw a man who was building his wall out of perpendicular you would instantly say, “ That man’s wall must of necessity fall down.” That is something which is universally known and felt to be true, and no man would be considered as taking upon him any very high degree of presumptuousness in declaring emphatically that the man who was building out of a straight line was building a structure that must of necessity fall to the ground. So with regard to matters of propriety. There are certain actions which instantly bring upon themselves universal condemnation—not the condemnation merely of cultivated taste and of technical rules of behaviour, but the condemnation of the whole civilised family of mankind. We only need to see them to have our indignation excited. This would be the case with the learned man and the man who was unlearned, with the old man and the young man. So we are walking along the line of what may be termed the common conscience, the common sense, and the common judgment of the world. Passing from these common and sim .e

matters, the same rule applies to things that belong to a world a little higher up. We have certain common moral judgments. There is not a youth in this house who, on seeing a big boy ill-using a little boy, would not instantly say, "That is wrong ; that boy is a bully or a coward ; he is doing a mean deed"; and he would morally condemn the tyrant's spirit and behaviour, and every one of us would instantly join in the condemnation, however severe it might be. Here again is common moral judgment—that is to say, a judgment that is common to all civilised and thinking persons, to all men in whom conscience has not been utterly and foully deposed. Suppose I point out to you a man, and can say truthfully about him, "This man spends all his genius and all his industry in getting out and circulating counterfeit coin," you would instantly and universally condemn him. His condemnation would not come from any special class amongst you ; you would not refer to men who were learned and men of critical judgment ; the common heart of mankind rises and says, "That man is wrong, and ought to be punished ; it is the coin of the commonwealth, and his crime, being detected, ought to bring upon itself the severest condemnation and punishment." Suppose, however, that I can go beyond this man, and say about another person, "Here is a man who makes his living by selling adulterated food. He sells bread which has been adulterated ; he sells articles of common consumption which have been poisoned ; he is making his living in this way," what would be the judgment upon him ? Would three or four of you—men of special culture—rise and say, "This question belongs to us ; we condemn the man who has been found guilty of selling adulterated food"? Would some of you say, "This case must be judged by older and more learned men than we are, by

men who have been long at school, by men of more severely trained judgment?" Nothing of the kind. If I could point out to you in this assembly a man whom I could honestly and successfully convict of selling adulterated food, this whole assembly would rise against him. I should touch the common sense—not a particular faculty, not a special sense, that has been under peculiar and long-continued culture—but I should touch the heart of men, and every one of you would cry out, "Shame upon him who sells bread that has been adulterated, and who thus lives at the expense of the lives of his fellow creatures!" So that you see that in some common things there is a spirit in man—the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding—there is a common judgment to which certain great questions may be referred, without doubt as to the verdict which will be pronounced.

Then we go into a higher world still. You condemned the man who was building his wall out of square; you said, "That man's wall will come down." You condemned the boy who was beating one who was less and weaker than himself; you said, "That is oppression." You condemned the man who was offering you counterfeit coin and the man who was selling you an adulterated loaf. Now you may go a little higher. We all have, more or less, the faculty of spiritual discrimination. We can say this is right and that is wrong in a higher sense than we can use these terms respecting common and visible things. We cannot explain what this power is. It is common to every civilised creature. There are things which a man does, and is yet ashamed of, because he knows they are wrong. There are cases of casuistry in which a man reasons himself into a certain line of conduct, and yet all the while he is ashamed of himself,

he is blushing in his heart, he knows very well that he is acting upon a transparent sophism, and he dare not pause to think, because a moment's thought would end in the destruction of his scheme. Now this is in us all, if so be we have any power of thinking and conscience left. It is not in men merely who make a profession of religion ; it is not in the principles of this denomination or that denomination : it is in all mankind, yet within the circle of civilisation and ordinary intelligence. We have a conscience, a power which distinguishes between the good and the bad, between light and darkness, between the upward path and the downward road. What is that voice that is within us, the voice which says, "That is true," and which says with equal emphasis about some other statement, "That is false"? What is that voice? It is the witness of God that is within us. God has not deserted us altogether. He has set up in our nature his own testimony ; yes, and even amongst the heathen, and amongst pagans, there is a conscience which lays down law, which distinguishes between right and wrong, which approves virtue and condemns vice. Is this voice sufficient for human guidance? No. What, then, is needed in addition to the voice that is within us? Two things are needed. A divine Revelation and a divine Teacher. The voice that is within us tells us, "I am not sufficient." Our own conscience cries out for training, for further light, for distinct loving personal teaching. Herein, indeed, is the great mystery of religion ; yet do not let it be thought a mystery that ought to deter any man from giving his whole strength and heart and soul to the further study of the matter. We see something even of this higher mystery if we go back again to the common affairs and the common duties of life. You say you know a crooked line from a straight one. So you do, but only up

to a given point. It is only when the line is very crooked that you know it to be so. There are deflections from perpendicularity and straightness that the eye cannot detect ; and there is no bricklayer amongst you and no carpenter that would trust his work to his unassisted eye. The most skilled and trained man amongst you says, “ If I am building this wall, or putting up this woodwork, I must have with me my plumbline and my square ; I must have a standard outside of myself ; I must not rest entirely upon the criticism and judgment of my unassisted eye.” What if it be precisely the very thing, with spiritual meanings and spiritual applications, that we insist upon in relation to the higher life ? You have an eye that can distinguish the crooked from the straight ; you have a conscience that can tell wrong from right. But as in the one case you need something more to make it critically correct, so in the second case you need the divine revelation and God the Holy Ghost to make your conscience perfect in its sense of right and wrong, absolute in its judgment as between the quality of one action and another. We all have the sense of hearing, it may be : we know one tone from another. We are able to say, “ That is what is called a sacred tune, and this a common or secular one.” So far we are upon an equality. But where is the man who would rest upon the mere hearing of his ear, if he could have access to scientific standards, to rules of music that have been settled by the masters of the art ? There is not a man amongst us who would trust his criticism to his unassisted ear ; he calls for rules and canons and standards, for decisions that have been agreed upon by the great masters of music. What if in the higher concerns of life, in the higher training of our moral nature, we require something out of and beyond ourselves, that shall be special in its quality and decisive

in its authority? You observe that the mystery of religion is not, after all, so gloomy and terrible a mystery as it may from some points of view seem to be. Under it there is always a germ of common sense, something which men can appreciate, and from which they can commence their highest and best reasonings. So with the naked eye in relation to scientific inquiry. I can tell one plant from another, I can tell one star from another, it may be ; I can distinctively say, "That is the sun and yonder is the moon." But do I rest there? What would be thought of a man who said, "I can see enough for my guidance ; don't trouble me with your scientific glasses or mathematical instruments and your optical assistance. Away with them! Do you mean to tell me I am a blind man?" The man who talked so would be instantly condemned as a fool ; people would laugh at him, and say he didn't know what he was talking about. Yet is it not perfectly true that he can tell one grass from another, one insect from another, one star from another, up to a certain point? But the wise man, the true student, says, "I dare not trust my judgments to the vision of the naked eye. You must give me a microscope through which to look at this leaf and this insect ; you must give me a telescope with which to search the heights of the heavens." What if in higher things we act precisely on your own principle? We can see great differences, we can say decisively that one thing is right and another thing is wrong ; but we want the naked judgment—if I may be allowed the expression—the naked conscience to have the assistance of such mediums and such instruments as God has specially provided for the education of our spiritual faculties.

So we need the divine revelation and God the Holy

Ghost. And as the man who would reject your scientific instruments and appliances would be pronounced presumptuous or insane if he ventured to lay down his judgment in contradiction of the decisions of scientific students, so the man that would argue that his natural conscience is sufficient for him must not be surprised if men of higher spiritual culture and finer spiritual insight say to him that he really does not know what he is talking about when he is so elevating and idolising his natural conscience and his common sense. We see the great features; we distinguish between the large characteristics. There is no difficulty at all about these things. We can read the capital letters. But understand, if you please, that there is a great deal of small print to be found out, to be accurately and critically read. Life is not a question of capital letters only, or of great broad features exclusively: there are fine distinctions, spiritual criticisms; there are points at which qualities shade off into one another; there are lines which lie imperceptibly beyond the naked and unassisted moral sense. It is there that we require the judgment of the Holy Ghost, the teaching of the Divine One, the express and emphatic revelation of God. So you see I am not detracting anything from man's insight; I am not for a moment saying that man has not very great powers of moral penetration. I allow all that man can claim on that side of the question, and when he has claimed to be able to see great distinctions and vital differences, I tell him that I accept his judgment as sound; but after that I charge him with deficiency in being able to read the finer shades and deeper and subtler relationships and interdependences of things. Up to a given point man is shrewd, keen in his insight, correct in his judgment, noble in his moral faculty and sense; but he fails at a certain point, he

wants assistance at a given line, and it is there that the revelation, inspired of God, comes to our assistance, and there that the Holy Ghost overshadows us and gives to our natural conscience high, spiritual, divine qualifications.

The other day, in riding through your city streets, what did I see? I saw this: I can affirm it, I can swear it! I saw "Murder! Pardon! Reward!" Have I not eyes to see? I drove past quickly, but I tell you solemnly that I saw these words upon one of your city walls; and I infer this from the capital letters,—that murder has been committed, that pardon is offered to the murderer, and that a reward is promised to his bloody hand! Do not talk to me. Can I not see? Can I not read plain English? Were the letters not very conspicuous? But you instantly tell me that if I was driving past so, I did not see the words that were between the capital lines; I was attracted by the great letters. If I had read more closely, which I could not do from the position I occupied, I should have seen that the case was altogether contrary. Murder had been committed—true; but the reward was offered to any one who could bring the offender to justice; and even the accomplice, in some degree, would be pardoned if he could secure the conviction of the principal offender.

So it is in moral judgments generally. There are great capital lines we can read, there are great broad distinctions we can make. But there are small lines, there is a minute printing, there are very microscopic shades which we cannot find out unless we have the assistance of God the Holy Ghost.

If I can succeed in teaching this I shall expect men to cry out for the light which alone can show the realities

of truth and of events, and the moral purpose of things that are round about them. If I can but teach this successfully, I shall work in men a spirit of discontent with their own moral qualifications. They will be glad that they have so much, and they will earnestly desire to have more. They will not rest content with their natural gifts ; they will ask God the Holy Ghost to be their teacher in the finest shades, in the subtlest and deepest bearings and purposes of truth. How then does the case stand with us? Thus : there is in every one of us a moral sense. Every man who now hears me has a monitor within him. There is an inborn teacher in every one of us—a teacher that does not hesitate to chide us when we would do wrong, that comes to us to tell us when we have spoken perversely ; a monitor that does not hesitate on the other hand, to commend us when we have done right, when we have suffered with patience, when we have been constant in affliction, when we have been heroic in persecution. But is that voice enough? It is not. Without it we should not be men ; with it we are distinguished from the brutes that perish. Without the gospel we should have nothing to appeal to ; education would have nothing to lay hold upon ; the highest influences would be wasted upon us, as rains upon the rocks or the desert sand. Yet there is something to begin with : there is a germ to develop ; there is a sight to cultivate ; there is a hearing to quicken ; there is a judgment to perfect. As the natural ear requires to be trained to distinguish between sounds and between measurements of time, so as to be musical and harmonious, so the inner ear requires to be trained and disciplined that it may hear the sub-tones of the divine voice as well as the thunderings of the divine testimony. And as the eye, however powerful, requires the assistance

of the microscope, the aid of the telescope, and the help of divers other instruments, in order to see the realities of the objects which it examines, so the moral eye requires the divine medium and the divine assistance, in order that it may see truth in all its reality, in its highest qualities, in its further bearings and purposes.

This I claim to be common sense. I do not say this is a gloomy mystery, and is to be received with the eyes shut. I say it is a glorious mystery ; but it is the culmination of something that is in ourselves, and it has common sense at the basis of it. He who believes it is honouring his own conscience and honouring the moral sense which God has implanted within him for his guidance in moral affairs. What does this voice say to us ? What has been its testimony to every one of us ? That we shall presently know. But let me tell you concerning this voice, that we may do it injustice by supposing that it is perfectly sufficient. The man who rests there will be a naturalist in theology ; he will be his own theologian ; possibly he will end by becoming his own god ! The man who knows himself best, who has tested himself under the most critical circumstances, will be the first to own that he needs something more than the voice that is within his own heart and his own conscience. He will not deny his own insight, his own penetration ; he will say, "This is only the beginning of something greater—the pledge of a still keener vision, the earnest of a still riper judgment."

We may discourage the exercise of that voice. Understand that. It is a solemn and terrible truth, that a man may so live as to discourage the moral voice that is within him. Hence we read that some men are "past feeling" ; they can now do the things which ten years

ago they could not have done without a shudder. To-day they can utter language without feeling that they are trespassing upon propriety or delicacy, not to say upon spiritual refinement, which they could not have uttered perhaps twelve months ago without blushing and without self-accusation. It is possible for a man to live down his conscience ; possible for a man to drug the monitor that is within him which teaches the difference between right and wrong. Is this the case with any of us? A man may say, "My conscience tells me so and so." Yes, but how have you treated your conscience? Tell me the training through which you have put your conscience before it came to that pass. Is it your natural conscience that is talking, or your drugged conscience? If you have abused your moral teacher, if you have slighted his counsels, if you have shut up the mouth that was open to utter to you words of wisdom and truth, if you have abused and insulted the very highest qualities of your nature, what right have you ten years afterwards to quote your conscience as an authority? Men may slay their consciences. In many a man, if we could but open his moral nature, we should find a dead conscience ; if not dead, profoundly sleeping—sleeping beyond the power of our awaking ; yet to be one day stirred again into consciousness, and to declare the ill-treatment which it has received.

Let us be careful, then, how we use the moral monitor that is within us. That good spirit will not always strive with man. There is a time when it will give up its importunity because of the abuse and the maltreatment which has been accorded to it. So that if any man is going to-night from this hall saying, "The preacher has taught us that we carry within ourselves a moral indicator,

a spiritual monitor, a conscience that will tell us what is right and what is wrong, therefore we need not look for anything else," I charge that man with purposing to make a grievous and terrible misrepresentation. I teach nothing of the kind in the sense in which it is now put. My teaching is this: We know the truth when we hear it. Up to a given point we have a sense which distinguishes between right and wrong, and it is upon this sense that the revelation of God is to operate. It is this sense that is to be strengthened, purified, and sanctified by God the Holy Ghost. And especially do I wish to teach the possibility of a man so far discouraging his conscience as absolutely to blunt and destroy its power. How is it with us in this respect? Once we knew the truth when we heard it preached, and loved it, and now we can hardly tell a just statement from an unjust one, a true spiritual doctrine from a doctrine of man's invention and ingenuity. Once we had a high critical faculty in truth; we knew not only broad, common characteristics, but inward and spiritual qualities, and we loved them, and we enjoyed to hear them expounded and enforced upon the attention of men. And now we hardly know truth from error. That is the course of evil. Men who live falsely live downwardly. Men who insult their consciences to-day will feel it easier to insult them to-morrow. Men who do evil one hour with difficulty will do it the next with fatal facility! How is it then with us? Let me suppose that I am dealing with a conscience that has been justly treated, that has not been so foully injured as I have now supposed conscience to be in some cases. There are two things your conscience will tell you. It will tell you, first, that you are not really good. Conscience never tells a man that he is altogether pure and spiritually good. It always

has something in its tone which means, "I could charge you with sin; I do not acquit you altogether; I have an account against you; I have an indictment to lodge against your spirit and your conduct." No man who knows himself deeply will be the man to claim supremacy in virtue. The more a man knows himself, the more he will say, that though his hands be clean there are stains in his heart and there are flaws in his spiritual life. We are not even to rest the matter here with conscience, and to sit down and say, "Conscience shall judge between you and me." I undertake to affirm, on the ground of my own experience, and an amount of testimony that is not narrow or partial, that there is no man who truly knows himself who will say that he is guiltless before God. Many of us can happily claim an honourable standing before men, we can defy the tongue of scandal and the hand of persecution; but when we turn Godward, and look at ourselves in the light of God's infinite holiness, we are broken down with shame and self-accusation! The second thing conscience, when not perverted, will tell a man is this—that he cannot make himself really good. He may attempt to do so, but every attempt he makes will but aggravate his torment. He may endeavour to cleanse his heart and to purify his life, but he will come back saying, "It is impossible to take out the deepest stain of my heart. I have made efforts; I have appointed hours of penance; I have undergone certain self-control and self-discipline and self-chastisement—call it what you please; I have said I shall stand here and sit there until I have myself under perfect control: and when I have done it all there has been an aching in my heart, a conviction that I could not silence, a charge I could not quash; what I have done has been but an exhibition of vanity, an abortive attempt to do something

in my own strength which I really had no strength to accomplish." How, then, is it to be with us? Are we to destroy the moral power with which we began life? Are we to depose our consciences? or are we to confess that though our moral nature has great powers and faculties, still it is not sufficient for our guidance? God meant man to be upright, but he hath found out many inventions. We are not as we were made. We are born in sin and shapen in iniquity. We are not as we came out of the hands of the Creator. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." We have bribed our conscience, we have drugged the holiest monitor given to us of God. "There is none righteous; no, not one." Yet is there a man in this house who does not know the truth when he hears it? Remember, if you do know the truth when you hear it, "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Now ye say ye know, your sin remaineth; had ye not known, ye should not have sinned. By so much as ye understand right from wrong, in a natural sense, so much will you utter your own condemnation in the day of judgment, when charged by the Almighty with having broken his law!

Seeing, then, that we are not good, seeing that we cannot make ourselves good, and yet seeing that we do know something of the difference between right and wrong—what is our condition? Our condition is that of sinners before God. What is God's answer to us? This: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life." "The Son of man is come to seek and save that which was lost." If we do not know of ourselves entirely and wholly what truth is, how can we

get to know it? The Holy Ghost is sent to teach men what is true, to lead men into all truth. If we cannot be wholly a law unto ourselves, so that we can guide ourselves, where is the law? All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for instruction and for correction, for reproof, for edification, and for the full furnishing of the man of God. There is a law written; there is a divine statute book; there is an inspired volume. This constitutes the law and the testimony to which our appeal must be made. Can I read these with my natural eyes only? Only to a very limited extent. How, then, can I get at their secret meaning and their spiritual bearing? By offering this prayer: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." "Holy Spirit, thou who didst indite the book, open mine eyes, that I may read it aright!" He who comes to the book in this spirit and with this prayer will find it to be a revelation from God to the heart of men.

I want you now to say, "Thou hast said the truth," I want you to pronounce judgment. The great thing I have to fear as a Christian teacher is this: want of concern, on the part of those who hear me, in regard to the subject that is expounded. Have I anything to fear from the intelligence of men, if so be I speak the truth plainly, simply, and lovingly? No. What, then, have I to fear? Death! Want of concern and interest in the thing spoken! This I have to fear: a languid assent to everything I say. That is the curse that we have to bear against. When men will nod assent to every sentence we utter; when they will, without excitement, acknowledge that what we say may be true, for anything they know or care;—it is there we break down. If men were anxious, if they were concerned, if they really wanted to

know this thing, then they would easily respond, they would gladly answer, and we should see great results of our ministry. But when men can hear us, even with approbation, as to the manner of stating the truth, and yet care nothing for its personal application to themselves, the heart gets sick. Oh that men could be pricked in their hearts until they cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved?" Oh that conscience was so fired as to be a torment to every man who was in the wrong! Then the gospel of Christ would have free course and be glorified, and tormented, sinning, penitent, broken-hearted men would say concerning the messengers of Christ, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good!" But who can cope with this spiritual death? who can stand against this spiritual unconcern? Yet what is our hope and what is our expectation? It is this only. It is God's word, and the word which is spoken shall not return unto him void!

III.

DOING NOT SAYING.

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."—MATT. vii. 21.

THE text clearly shows the possibility of knowing the name without knowing the nature of our one Lord and infinitely sufficient Saviour. It shows the terrible possibility of being familiar with great names and knowing nothing about great sacrifices and great services. It further shows how near a man may apparently be to the kingdom, and yet how far he may at the same moment be really from it. A man may be a liar in the sanctuary ! He may say, "Lord !" without yielding obedience ; he may repeat the word, and then consult his own will only, in working out the way of his life. Is this, then, an argument against profession ? No. There must be profession of moral principles ; there must be a bearing of spiritual names ; there must be outward and visible attitude and distinctly audible testimony. There must be a Church in the world, visible, approachable, nameable ; a Church that can be indicated, about which men can say, "That is the Church of the living God. If you want to know what Christianity in its highest form is, look at that Christian society, redeemed by the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ, God the Son,

regenerated by God the Holy Ghost, and named in the threefold name, without which no life is possible—the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost!"

But what we are called upon to observe is this : there must be testimony, distinct and audible, but that testimony must be supported, illustrated by affluence of Christian behaviour, nobleness of spiritual temper, by all the fruits of the Holy Ghost ; otherwise we shall be but as trees in winter-time, beautiful enough in skeleton and in form, but without sap and without leaf, without blossom and without fruit. There need not be any great mystery about this. We are to say, "Lord, Lord," but we are to do what we say ; our behaviour is to be the incarnation and public expression of the gracious doctrines we profess. Sometimes I have known cases in which there has been very little open, nominal profession, yet the whole life has been lived in harmony with the choicest principles of Christian charity and social grace. We are not to judge a man by the loudness of his profession. We are not to condemn a man because his profession is feeble. The one determining question is not, "Have you a label outside?" but, "Have you the grace of God in your heart?" The question is not, "What is your profession when written out under so many leading divisions, and indicated by so many minute points?" but, "What is the life of your soul? what is the being of your heart? what is it that in your heart of hearts you love most? and what is it for which you would die, if need were?" Let me show this, partly imaginatively and partly by distinct, didactic teaching. I undertake to show you how these things operate in life ; and if I speak in parable, and under the guise of imagination and fancy, you will easily distinguish the incidentally imaginative from the spiritually true.

The first time I called upon a late lamented writer it was with a very heavy heart. I was the chief support of a sister incurably afflicted, and my hope was that a story which I had written would so far commend itself to the judgment and taste of the great novelist as to secure his patronage in the form of an introduction to a bookseller. The clergyman in the parish had given me a good certificate, so that in point of character I could stand confidently before any man. I remember what a strange creeping came over me as I got within a few yards of the great man's door. I had always a veneration for genius, and specially for the genius which made me laugh and cry at pleasure, and often left upon me the impression that I had been dreaming by the seaside, or wandering through enchanting woods and meadows in violet-time. When he spoke to me, on the occasion in question, the very touch of his hand had life in it. But what shall I say about the look he gave me when he had read the clergyman's note? I had never seen such a look before. There was tender pity in it. It made me love the man at once.

"The note only says, 'The bearer.' What is your full name?" said the magician.

"Lord Wilberforce," I replied.

The great man looked quite another look, which meant that he was anxious to see the Lord Wilberforce part of me, but really could not.

"I beg pardon, sir," said I instantly. "That is the name of the story; my own name is Thomas Benson."

"Not *Lord* Thomas?" he inquired, with such a twinkle in his eye! "And your sister's name?"

"Bessie Benson, sir."

"Then let us call her 'B. B.'"

"Thank you, sir," said I, being more grateful than

coherent, and inferring from his manner that my suit was likely to come to a good end. Of course it was impossible for him to characterise my sister by her initials without intending to make a great man of me in some way or other.

"Now let me see your story, Thomas." He actually called me *Thomas*, and I never knew before how much music could be thrown into that combination of letters. This was an additional proof that he intended to make me something like equal to himself in literature. Otherwise, so I reasoned, how could it be that such a man could talk familiarly to a youth? I produced my story, whereupon the illustrious man told me to air myself in his garden for half an hour, that he might glance at it quietly. It was a beautiful garden—a place fit for a poet and a dreamer of the finest dreams. On the expiration of that period he recalled me.

"Sir," said he, "have you the mind of a knave and the heart of a pirate?"

I was speechless. My tongue and lips dried up in a moment; and if a man could be honestly convicted for looking foolish, I could have been transported for life without the shadow of a doubt. In that moment all my happy impressions were dissolved!

"I have," he sternly continued, "already seen six murders, three shipwrecks, and five railway accidents in your story. One of your characters never goes out with less than two pistols, and another of them never sleeps but with a drawn sword under his pillow. Sir! how is this?"

I fumbled in my pockets, and drew some remarkably mysterious figures on the carpet with one foot, and otherwise convicted myself as a criminal worthy of severe chastisement. Dream and hope had now fled, and I was poorer than ever.

"I tell you what it is, sir," said the great man,—alas ! mine idol no longer : "Are you not an empiric and a prig ? have you not mistaken the light of a tallow candle for the light of wit and genius ? and the sooner you take to chimney-sweeping will it not be the better for all parties ?"

I had no defence to offer, because I had secretly trusted to the murders, the shipwrecks, and the accidents to make an impression of my power, and if *they* failed—where was I ?

"How old are you ?" my censor inquired.

"Nineteen, sir."

"Nineteen ! and so far gone in wickedness already ! Whatever will you be when you are forty ? Why, sir, the thing is terrible to think of. Society itself will be in danger, and even government may tremble for its life. Thomas, this is very sad ! But for your sister's sake, of whom the clergyman speaks so kindly, I do not know what course I should have pursued. If you are spared it will be for her sake, and certainly not for your own. Take this note to her, and it will explain to you both something of the feeling which you have created in my heart. Good-bye, Thomas ; it is very, very sad !"

I was fleet of foot when I got outside. I was sure that everybody must have heard my severe critic, and that many people were secretly laughing at me as a young idiot. I could have thrown the story into a drain with great comfort, but no drain was kind enough to offer itself. And how could I show Bessie such a note ? She had been so much interested in the murders, the shipwrecks, and the accidents, and had—poor thing—asked me to read some of them twice over to her. I would destroy the note ! Why should I be the bearer of my own shame ? Why should I carry the halter with which I was to be strangled ? Yes, I would destroy the note.

But no ; after all, I could not do that. It was addressed to my sister and not to me, and therefore it was not my property. I would be brave for once. So I was. At a gulp I swallowed my pride ; threw the note upon her lap as she lay upon her poor hard couch—which in reality was an old settle out of an inn, which we had bought for a few shillings—if haply she could rest upon it for an hour or two now and then ; and in the corner of the room, where it was darkest, I courageously awaited the result. During that period what maledictions I poured upon my idol I forbear to put on record. I could see no genius in his writings ; he himself was worthy to be described by the very terms which he had applied to me ! Whatever others might do with his books, in future they would remain unopened by my fingers. So I was reasoning, when my sister exclaimed :

“ What a wonderfully kind man ! ”

I asked her to explain herself, thinking that she had been turned into an enemy by some malignant temptation. When I looked at her I found that she was in tears. I picked up the note and discovered within it a cheque for five guineas, and in the note itself the following words :

To Thomas : “ Write your story again very carefully, and see me when it is done.”

To Bessie : “ ‘ I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.’ ”

To both Thomas and Bessie : “ Fear God ; and have no other fear ! ”

“ Not every one that saith, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my father which is in heaven.” Are we not oftentimes misconstruing men ? We look at them from a certain point of view, see them in certain attitudes, and condemn them accordingly ; yet when we go home and open the note, we

find the very gospel of the grace of God written in it. Are there not many men amongst us who, were you to judge them by their speech, you would say they are very severe, very villainous, very mean, and as such ought to be condemned and avoided? What if, when the note of their life is opened out, and God himself reads it to us, we find that though they have not said, "Lord, Lord," they have all the while been doing deeds which never could have been done but for the spiritual grace and life of God in them? There may be loud professions and very little practice. There may be the utterance of "Lord, Lord," and no Christly love be in the heart. How then? Is not the heart, under such circumstances, a painted sepulchre—a charnel-house with a gilded sign?

Shall I tell you of a minister who loudly preached the law and sternly pronounced the judgment of the Lord against what he considered every form of evil? He had a beautiful daughter, who was lured into forbidden ways. A more simple-minded, trustful child never blessed the fireside of any home. But she was led away. Not all at once, indeed, did she take the great leap into the terrible darkness; she traversed a gently inclined plane. Could she have spoken freely to her father, she would never have gone so far; but when she did speak to him, he received her at the point of the cold, sharp sword of the law. He did not understand her tears. He knew not that righteousness must be merciful if it would be complete. He was stern, hard, upright—a man who weighed and measured everything by law, and turned the gospel itself into redemption by arithmetic. His child left him. She soon felt the cold and the darkness, the bitter hunger and the sharp pain of those who are the servants of sin. In much suffering—such suffering as tears the heart in secret and

goads the brain to madness—she turned her steps towards her father's house, and asked me on the way to plead for her. I cannot forget her woe-worn face ; there were great red rings round her beautiful eyes—the eyes which should have been full of light, of young hope, and girlish merriment. She was old too soon ; she had drunk of the cup of which if any woman drink she can never be young again. She came to me. The night was darkened by great rains, which fell through a keen north wind, and yet she had but little on to keep out the sharpness of the harsh night. She stammered out that she was tired and sad and penitent, and that she longed to tell her father so, and die in her mother's chair. I hastened to him—I never went so quickly anywhere in my life—to tell him that he might rise at once almost to heaven, for his child, so long lost, was at the door.

“I cannot see her, sir ; no wicked person shall dwell in my sight.”

“But she is penitent.”

“She must prove that before I can receive her.”

“Sir ! do you talk so about your poor, weary, jaded child ? See her but for a moment, and you will pity her misery”

“Sir,” said he, in a hard legal tone, “the way of transgressors is hard.”

“Sir,” said I, “I'm ashamed of you. Such hearts as yours never knew the gospel of Jesus Christ ! You were never in Gethsemane—you were never on Calvary. Your poor, wronged, sinning, broken-hearted child will be in heaven, upon the breast of the living God, and you yourself will be justly thrust down to hell !”

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven.” This man was saying, “Lord, Lord,” in every sermon he preached, every prayer

he offered ; but when his own poor child came to the door he stiffened himself, and became not merely un-Christian, but diabolical ! How is it with us ? Are our words Christian, and is our behaviour un-Christian ? Are we keen in the formal statement of Christian truth, and yet devoid of nobleness and charity and magnanimity and grace ? I want the combination of both. I would not lower the testimony one iota ; I would not take one tone out of any man's voice who was speaking the Lord's testimony loudly, clearly, gently, and pathetically. But I would say to him, "That is not all. Now we must have the other side—the beautiful life, the gentle word, the hopeful view of things, as they are lying in apparent confusion around us. We must be resolute in doctrine, strong in truth, and also gentle and charitable and noble ; and ere the contrite, broken-hearted man has spoken to us half his prayer, we must fall upon his neck and forgive him all his sin." There are undoubtedly some very clever sayers of the gospel, but where are the doers of the truth ? Doing is the best saying. Sacrifice is the best discussion. A pure life in God the Son is the most splendid and effective eloquence.

Shall I tell you what I saw the other day ? It made me laugh, and yet it made me sad. I saw, in one of your parks, a poor little ragged boy, who was evidently hungry, and who was anxious to appeal successfully to the pity of the public. He was met by a tall, lean, clean man, who set his long, bony fingers together stiffly and impressively, and lectured the child in very suitable language. I overheard him say, "This is not proper. You ought to have been at school ; you should not be prowling about here in this way. There are places provided for such as you, and I earnestly advise you to get

away from this course of life." Every word he said was grammatically correct and socially very true. As he was delivering his frosty lecture to the poor lad, there came a boy—a schoolboy hastening to school—who was carrying a large lump of bread-and-butter in his hand, which he was eating as schoolboys only can eat; and when he saw the poor ragged child, he pulled his bread-and-butter in two, put one half into the boy's hand, and went on. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." That boy, who gave his bread and butter away, will stand a better chance than the ninety-nine legally upright, who apparently need no repentance Let me, however, guard myself from misinterpretation, because some may be ready to say, "Then if works of that kind secure heaven, we can do them in abundance." But they don't secure heaven. Do not misrepresent me as teaching this view. We have known them done out of mere animal sensibility, which goes for little or nothing. Charity that is done on purpose, and put in as an investment, never bears any interest. If a man say, "I shall give away so much bread in the hope that I may thereby secure heaven," God will not open the door of heaven to him. He is working on wrong principles and doing good in a wrong spirit. These acts of charity and noble service are to be done out of the spirit, because of the indwelling spiritual grace wrought in us by the Holy Ghost! We cannot do good deeds on purpose. We cannot say, "Now to-day I shall do some very charitable actions. I shall begin at a certain hour and continue until a certain stroke of the clock." That is not Christian life. That is pedantic benevolence, it is self-laudatory and self-exalting charity. The noblest and most beautiful deeds are done unconsciously, and done because Christ's grace is in the heart, and the very

Cross of Calvary is the centre and inspiration of our life. Let me repeat, then, for the advantage of those who require to have a thing said many times before they believe it has been said at all, that there must be testimony, there must be profession, there must be distinct enunciation of the words, "Lord, Lord," but the highest eloquence, the best pronunciation, is the utterance of life—noble, true, gracious, beautiful as the beauty of holiness !

"He that doeth the will of my Father." The thing to be cured in a man is self-will. So long as there is one feeling of self-will in the heart, the work of Christian grace has not been completed in us. So long as a man says, "I do this because I wish it to be done, I like it to be done, though I am invited to do something else for the sake of another," so long as he can choose his own will in preference to God's will, that man has a battle to fight in his own heart. If a man shall sit down in his pew and say, "I give so much to the support of this place; I have a right to this seat, and I shall sit here," and there be a poor woman standing in the passage who, on account of her poverty, shall not be allowed to share his seat, the grace of God is not in that man. But has he not a right to it? No. But he pays for it. Pay never secures any rights. It secures conveniences, and what, for the sake of convenience, may be termed social rights; but who has the right to injure weakness, to frown upon the humble and the lowly, to give men to feel the disadvantages of their position? Such rights are not to be purchased. If a man says, "I should like to do that; I wish above all things that I could do it. I dream about it, scheme about it—I wish to do it—I will do it!" and then says, "No, for Christ's sake I cut off this right hand," that man is in the kingdom of grace, and no other man is in it.

I care not if he speak with the thunder, his testimony is but a loudly pronounced falsehood.

Shall I make this plain to the little folks? I should like you little boys and girls to understand this. A certain man had two sons, and both of them said they loved their father. One of them said so loudly and boastfully; the other said so quietly and clearly. It came to pass that their father asked both of them to do a piece of work for him. The son of many words and with the loud voice said, "I love my father as much as any man can love him, but I want to have to-morrow upon the river; I have no time to do what he asks me to do; I have set my mind upon going on the river to-morrow, and all my plans will be broken if I do not go; and, by the way, did you not tell me that you were going out to-morrow with the field naturalists to seek some uncommon plant supposed to be in this neighbourhood?"

The other son said, "Yes, I did, and I have got everything ready for going out to-morrow; and I had set my mind upon going."

During the night the son of many words and loud voice saw his way luckily out of the difficulty. He rose early—went to the river to have a row—said he would be back in good time to his father's work. He meant it too! He would have resented any hint to the contrary angrily and with vehement words. Away he went. The time passed quickly. He loved his father, and he said, "Well, I will do double work when I get home; and now that I am on the river I will have my spin fully out; I will work better for it when I do begin." He meant it too! He would let his father see how much he loved him after he had enjoyed his merry spin upon the river; yes, and after that all would be easy and beautiful. This was a

very "lucky" way out of it. He would thus enjoy his day upon the river, and then, he said, "You see, I shall be so fresh and so happy. I shall do double work in half the time, and my father will see how much I love him." The other son said nothing. It is a dangerous thing when a man begins to talk about his duties—he has lost the battle then. The moment he begins to reason about them he is a dead man. Quietly the boy did his work. He did it for his father's sake. He made no boast about his own merits. He met his brother without a boast or a taunt. He crucified his own pleasure that he might lovingly do his father's work. Which of them really loved his father? What is love worth if it does not cost us something? You say, "I do love my father very much." Well now, your father says, "Take this letter to the post for me before eight o'clock." "Before eight! I would do it after eight with pleasure!" Yes, after you had done your own little business, and arranged your own little affairs; then, when you had nothing on hand, you would do it with great pleasure! Love is not in that scheme one bit. He loves his father who says, "I should like to have done this first, but father has asked me to go to the post before eight o'clock. You stand there till I come back again." That is love. Not the boy that says, "Now, father, I have got this to do; I want to do it very much, but I love you such a very great deal, father, I shall do what I want to do, but I will go to the post for you," under the impression that his father would say, "Dear fellow, here's a shilling for you." There is not one little scrap of love in that. It is in the self-denial, in putting down that little tyrant that is in the heart, and saying, "Get down! You shan't speak! Down!" and never saying a word to anybody about what a fight you have had in your heart,—then you love your father; and

that love only is worth having that has cost us something. Jesus says, "If any man love me, let him take up his cross daily, and follow me."

What will am I to do? The will of Jesus Christ's Father. Then he must have made known his will to men? Yes. Where can I find a statement of his will that I may read it? In the Scriptures. We must read his will in his word. We must find his purposes in his statutes and his precepts. We must pray God the Holy Ghost in this language, "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law." The Holy Scriptures, read through the ministry and grace of the Holy Ghost, will show us God's will. And if we say, "Now I know the will, but I have no strength to do it; there is no help in me: Father, help me to do it," there shall come into the heart access of strength that will enable us to do the will—though through much suffering in some cases; yet out of the suffering there shall come a rich, glad, eternal joy!

Where are the Christians of to-day? If self-will is to be taken out of a man, where is the Christian? If I want to know whether or not a man is a Christian, do I ask him to tell me his Christian doctrine? No. If I want to know if a man has the Christ of God in his heart, I do not say, "Now, first, what do you believe? then, secondly, thirdly." I live with him; I see him under difficulties; I see him when the cross upon his shoulder is very heavy; I see him when his own will is snubbed and his own way is broken up, when his wishes are all shaken at their foundations. I then say, "How does he bear it?" I see him when he has been insulted or injured. I say, "How does he bear it?" I see him when he meets his enemies face to face. I say,

"With what port does he bear himself?" It is then I know something of his belief, something of the Christ that is in his heart. If he repeat the Apostles' Creed from morning till night, and will not forgive an enemy who has come to him saying, "I repent," the Apostles' Creed will be a millstone round his neck that shall sink him into the bottomless sea! Who then can be saved? Believing that the preacher's power consists, to a large extent, in his being one with his hearers in sympathy and in the expression of feeling, I hasten to say that I cannot lay claim to this high character; I cannot exalt myself above any man that is here, and say, "I love Jesus more than you do." I want to love him; I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do—I press towards the mark! Sometimes, for days together, I think I am very good, I am living very well; and then, on the third or fourth day, there will come such a rush of bad thinking and bad feeling into my heart that I say, "I cannot preach any more; when I am preaching to the people that come to hear me, I shall give myself the lie, I shall be saying to myself all the time, 'Now you are saying that, and saying it very emphatically, but the devil is your master.'" That is my experience. I find a law in my members warring against the law of my mind; so that when I would do good, evil is present with me. And if I live one day pretty well and look at it at night, I can see stains upon it; and though I can defy the constable and the magistrate, yet when I look at life in the light of God's holiness, in the light of the Saviour's Cross, I see the meaning of the startling words, "There is none righteous; no, not one." Then what are we to do?—broken, shattered, bruised, what are we to do? We are to rest upon the Cross! We are to cling to the self-sacrificed Son of God! By him alone can we have peace!

Are we doing so? Let us not judge one another harshly. Perhaps the worst man is better than he appears to be. Sometimes medicine may be food ; bitterness may be sweet ; disappointment may be the seed of a new hope. Do not sit in judgment, O man ! and kick in the face those who come to thee. Be gentle to the worst, the meanest the foulest, to the

“One more unfortunate,
Rashly importunate,
Gone to her death.”

Do her good if you can, be gentle even to her dead bones :

“Owning her weakness,
Her evil behaviour,
And leaving with meekness
Her sins to her Saviour !”

Surely if we are saved, it shall be by the infinite grace of the infinite Redeemer !

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou givest unto all men liberally, and upbraidest not. Thou didst give thine only begotten Son to save the world. If thou didst not spare him, is there aught that thou wilt deny? Help us to believe that what thou givest is best, and what thou dost withhold is not for our good. Teach us this by the ministry of the Holy Ghost, and our hearts shall rest in content and hope. No good thing wilt thou withhold from them that walk uprightly. Thou delightest to give, yet dost thou often refuse: teach us that refusing is the best giving, seeing that it is dictated by thy love. Give each a wise and understanding heart: give us more faith: give us all blessings in one great gift—give us the Holy Ghost! We have nothing that we have not received. All things are thine. The light is not ours, nor the air; neither is the former nor the latter rain; the gold and the silver are thine, though we have minted them with human names; and the cattle upon a thousand hills are thine, though we have driven them into our folds and stalls. We are thy children through Jesus Christ, and all that thou hast is ours. Lord, hear us! Lord, pity us! Lord, save us! Incline us all more and more to keep the whole law of love. When we truly love thee, we shall love our neighbour also, and we shall be satisfied with the great gift of holy work to-day rather than be restlessly seeking after signs and wonders. Oh, come to us! Sit upon the throne of our love and rule our whole life! For Christ's sake hear us. Amen.

IV

THE REFUSALS OF JESUS CHRIST.

"There shall no sign be given unto this generation."—MARK viii. 12.

(*Delivered in Exeter Hall.*)

WE often speak of what Jesus Christ gave. I propose to say something about certain gifts which Jesus Christ refused to bestow. According to the text, Jesus

Christ can say No as well as Yes. I am anxious to understand, so far as may be possible, what the line is which separates the things which he will not give from the things which he is prepared to confer upon men. Is it not very seldom that Jesus Christ says No? Does it not seem most natural to him when we walk with him, day after day, through his wondrous ministry, to say Yes to everybody; to give an instantaneous, emphatic Yes to every request that is put to him? It is surely so. He came to give; he came to give truth; he came to give himself. No man ever yet took such great scope within which to say the word Yes. Yet now and again he said No as no other man ever said it. There was such finality in the tone, such decision and completeness of judgment, that few were able to ask him a second time to confer the gift which he once declined. It will be interesting to us, therefore, as an evening study, to find out something about this region of Jesus Christ's life in which he set up a signal of No, and then to turn round and take a few minutes' survey of that infinitely wider region within which he set up Yes and his Welcome.

The people said unto him, "Show us a sign." No! "Let us see another miracle." No! "Give us but one more instance of thy power: we are wavering, we are a little undecided and hesitant about thee; but we think that if we had just one more exhibition of that strange power of thine we would yield ourselves with loyal homage to thy sceptre." No! He was so positive in his manner, so decisive in his tone, so apparently obstinate, that the men could not ask him any more on that day. For what purpose did they want a sign? To satisfy their curiosity. Miracles never yet satisfied any man. Taken in themselves, whoever has seen one miracle wants to see another;

whoever has seen one wonderful work says to the operator, ‘Do it again.’ So he might be kept on doing miracles from sunrise to sundown, for it is not in the nature of wonderful works to satisfy the deepest necessities of human life. Therefore Jesus Christ made but a spare use of these great mysteries of his, in which he wrestled with nature and overthrew the giant, and stood above nature—obviously, in the eyes of all men, Lord and King. Do you want your curiosity satisfied? There will be returned to you a keen, piercing, solemn, and unchangeable No! But suppose that by doing another miracle he could have won the confidence of the people? It was impossible. The confidence of such people was not to be won. It is possible to win the confidence of a certain class of people at too dear a price. They would have taken all the miracles that God himself could have wrought,—if one may say so modestly and reverently; they had great capacity for sight-seeing; they could have looked on for long years at miracle after miracle. But Jesus Christ knew that confidence was not to be won in that way. The men that hang around you only so long as you can show sign, picture, and wonderful work will drop from your side the moment your right hand forgets her cunning, the moment you say, “I have no more wonderful things to show you.” But the men who hold you by the heart, who love your purity and nobleness and wisdom, who trust you in the dark and cloudy day, who offer you their voice of counsel and their eye of guidance—they are the men who will be faithful for ever, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them. It does seem, now and again, as we read the story of Jesus Christ’s life, that if he had done sundry things he might have gathered great multitudes round about him. But he came not to call multitudes round about him merely, but to save men.

No man was ever yet saved by mere miracles. He is saved by an action upon the heart, a gracious entrance into the spirit and the life and the wonder-working power of the sacrifice of the Son of God as interpreted by the Holy Ghost. We have seen no miracles, but we have seen greater sights. The greatest appeals are addressed to the heart. There may be more value in one living sentence than in all the wonders that ever were wrought—such wonders as appeal to the eye, as startle the senses, and awaken momentary admiration. Go into a country where the gospel is unknown, learn the language of the people there, and write in their language this sentence, "God is love," and you have done a greater miracle than if you had silenced the storm of the sea, arrested the planets in their course, or done any of the wonderful deeds which would strike human curiosity and fancy as very marvellous and amazing. Speak to a man when he is in deep distress one word of inspired consolation and hope, and you do something far greater than if you had wrought before him all the marvels of Egypt, or had repeated in one gigantic stroke all the miracles that are seen upon the page of the Saviour's history. He himself, the Lord of light and wisdom, said, "Greater works than these shall ye do because I go unto my Father." The conversion of the soul is the sublimest miracle which can be wrought by the ministry of man.

Compare, if you please, what he gave with what he refused, and then you will see the reasonableness and the graciousness of that emphatic No which so startled you a little while since. When you heard him say No! you said he is an austere man, who will certainly not give more than he can possibly help; he withholds all he can; it is evidently his delight to do as little as

possible in order to secure a standing in society. Let us see if your convictions be altered. We will spend a day with the Saviour, we will journey with him and keep a vigilant eye upon how he does things, and what he does, how many people he answers, and by these means we shall learn something of the graciousness and the scope of his Yes. Look at him. Yonder there is a blind man crying out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Listen. You heard Jesus say No! to some men yesterday: see the beneficent smile that is upon his countenance now: "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" "Lord, that I may receive my sight." "Be it unto thee according to thy faith." And the man's eyes were opened, and the man's God was the first picture painted upon them. Jesus can say Yes then. Walk on a little farther. Look at yonder crowd. There is in the centre of the crowd a dumb child, a child who has never spoken, who has never heard his own mother's voice. Concerning him it is said, "Lord, do thou but restore his hearing and his speech. Nay, restore them is saying too much to thee; create them—the poor child never had them; bestow the faculty of hearing and speaking upon him, Lord." You heard him say No, and the No seems still to be ringing in your hearing, and you tremble lest he should say No again. But see how his eye brightens, how his face flushes with colour, how he elevates himself in the dignity of an essential and eternal majesty, and says, "Hear! Speak!" and the deaf heard and the dumb sang. Truly, then, this man can say Yes as well as No!

Look at him going into the synagogue. The moment he steps over the threshold he feels that there is a man there with a withered hand. He was not to be pointed

out. The moment Jesus entered the synagogue he felt the incompleteness of one life that was there. He said, "There is a piece lost ; there is a man here of incomplete formation." He commanded the man to stand forth ; he held an interview with him, and restored his hand that it became like the other.

Yonder is a great multitude that have been with him some few days in the wilderness and have had nothing to eat. He says, "I will not send the people away fasting, lest they should faint by the way. Give ye them to eat ; make them sit down. I will give them bread, that their hunger may be satisfied." So he can say Yes.

Yonder are two sisters weeping and wailing over their lost brother, and they say, "Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother had not died ; but even now—" I never knew faith go so far as that ! It was a woman's faith. Women have always gone farther upward than men. When we have exhausted our big keys for opening great doors, they have had some little key that they have brought out to open a further secret door, that led to something better still. Here it was profoundly true of the womanly insight, love and faith—"even now." Where a man would have shrunk, where he would have said, "It cannot be now ; the door is shut, the line is drawn, the great darkness is come ; I must go away," it was there a woman shot this arrow into the heart of Christ—"even now !" What will he say ? He will say, "No, Martha, it is too late." No,—faith like that always brings out of him some new power of Godhead, some unseen and hitherto unfelt graciousness. He cried with a loud voice. Death heard the voice and gave up the captive ! Truly this dear Son of God knows how to say Yes !

Behold, then, we have seen him give sight and speech, health and bread, life and peace ; yet he says to the Pharisees, " I will give you no sign." At first I thought he was very severe in declining a sign ; but now that I have spent this day with him, and gone round about his work, and seen exactly how he does things, I say, " This No was right. I am sure that he who would give sight and speech and healing and bread and life would not have refused a sign if the sign had been for the good of those who asked it."

The application of this little historical survey is this : what is true of Christ in this matter is true of Christianity. If I can teach that doctrine with success, it will help many to get over some difficulties. Christianity is a giving force and also a refusing power. Christianity, like Christ, can say Yes, and can say with equal emphasis and decision, No. It is well for the readers of the holy book and students of the beautiful doctrine to know where the Yes ends and the No begins, to understand what doors are private and are shut till the King himself goes to his girdle for the key that can open them, and what doors stand open day and night and have eternal welcome written upon their portals. It will save us much time if at the very beginning we understand where the No is and where the Yes is, and have strength given us to endure with patience the shut door and to enter with joy the open portal. Can I introduce any of you to Jesus Christ ? Before I undertake to introduce you to the Saviour, I should like to know what it is that you wish to have from him. Please to tell me, that I may know whether to introduce you or not. What do you want ? " I want to have that thin, almost transparent curtain, which separates time from eternity, withdrawn, that I

may get but one swift glimpse into the things that lie beyond." Then I cannot introduce you. He will not withdraw that curtain. Men, through all ages, have been endeavouring to tug it aside, and the strongest man has not been able to reach it or to do anything in the direction of drawing it from its fastenings. It is no use my wasting my time with you, because that cannot be done. "I want to take to him some very difficult passages in the Old Testament scripture, which no interpreters have yet been able to solve, that I may ask him one or two curious questions about them." Then I cannot introduce you, because there are passages which he himself has written purposely, that he may keep our faith alive and our reverence intact. There are burning bushes we must not approach too closely,—the moment we see them we must put off our shoes, for the place whereon we stand is holy ground. What do you want? "I want to see my dead friend—the best I ever had. One visit from that friend, even in a vision of the night, would satisfy me, that I might ask questions and learn the mystery of the future; then I think I could yield my heart to Jesus Christ and be at rest." Then I cannot introduce you. It cannot be done. He has given an answer upon that very point already. He has been entreated to send one from the dead to a house where brethren were living in rioting and worldliness; and the answer was by the mouth of his servant Abraham, "If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe, though one rose from the dead." What do you want? "I want life eternal." Then come! He will give you life eternal, but he will not satisfy your idle curiosity or answer your irreverent questions. Will you say to him with stammering lips, in poor, broken, ineloquent speech, "Lord, I would live"? His whole heart is given to you! The very key of the

mystery of his grace is handed to you. There is nothing in his love that he will keep from such hunger as yours! He will not let me draw the curtain that hides the unseen. What will he do then? He will give me promise of heaven; he will hide a great assurance in my heart; he will put within me a promise and a hope which shall be to me food and water in the wilderness of this life; and because of their presence in me I shall have heaven by anticipation. He will not show me a miracle then? Will he not just place his foot upon a star, that I may see it? Will he not just wave his hand once across the heavens? No. What will he do then? He will give you joy unspeakable and full of glory, and peace that passeth understanding. But no miracle, no answer to idle whim, no satisfaction to irreverent curiosity; he will meet you at the Cross, but not where mere miracles are to be wrought. What then? Just understand what Christianity will give,—take that. Understand what Christianity will refuse, and be content with the No. Why? Because if you read the life of Jesus Christ you will find this: that he never withheld anything that was for the real good of anybody that came to him with a sincere heart. If that be so, Christianity draws its own argument and its defence from the Spirit and method of Jesus Christ. Christianity will give men peace, joy, through having shown a way to pardon and purity. But Christianity says about all other things which we wish to have seen and solved, "Wait." I shall show my sense and my piety, the solidity of my character and the reality of my convictions, by accepting the great Yes and leaving the No to be solved in the good time and way of God. Yes, this is true. When he told the Pharisees that no sign should be given unto their generation, he left them, and so showed them the greatest sign of all. No sign may be the greatest sign. He left . . .

he turned away from those who sought from him picture, marvel, wonder, and sign. As the shadow fell upon them, no sign so black had ever fallen upon their lives, had they but apprehended its meaning. No sign is the greatest, saddest sign of all. When he leaves a man to himself, when the man has no light upon his life, no hope in his heart, no joy in his spirit, that may be the greatest of all the signs that could be given to him. Saul, the king of Israel, complained to the poor weird woman in the cave that God answered him no more, neither by dream, nor sign, nor vision, nor seer. That no-sign was, in reality, the greatest sign that Saul had ever known. So with some of us. We may be "past feeling"; we may be saying to ourselves, "If God would show something he has not yet shown us, we would surely believe." The fact is, that having exhausted, so far as we could exhaust, the mercy, patience, love, care of God, we have wrought ourselves out of all feeling and sensibility, and now we want sensationalism to meet what the grace of God has failed to accomplish.

This is the attitude of Christianity. Christianity will not amuse men, will not answer their riddles, satisfy their idle whims, follow them through all the vagaries of their fancy. Christianity will give them pardon, purity, peace, hope of heaven, rest to their souls. If these things will not satisfy, God himself will say No to those who would put forth their hand to touch things forbidden. This is right. I verily believe, so far as many ministers are concerned—and I will put myself in their number—we could do some things by sensationalism that are not possible to common-sense thinking, common-sense appeals, common-sense persuasions. I know perfectly well that, under the inspiration of the devil, I could do things upon

this platform that would soon fill this hall to overflowing. I am perfectly conscious of that. I know enough of myself to be perfectly aware of it. But I should be paying too dear a price for the idle, foolish crowd : it would be giving too much for so paltry a return. No. If common sense, if honest thinking, if resolute endeavour, if earnest persuasion will not do, do not disturb the dead, do not become a buffoon to please the idle, a mountebank to satisfy those who cannot understand wisdom. This is precisely what Jesus did. He could have done so many things that were sensational, and would not. Where there was real necessity to be met, he met it ; where there was an earnest man to talk to, he talked to him. He never told any poor creature that went to him for advice regarding the deepest things of life, "I am weary ; I cannot talk to you to-day ; you must go, and come back some other time." No ; he spent himself for the poorest creature that crawled to his feet to ask questions about truth, and sin, and love, and duty, and peace, and goodness. That must be our preaching. The Church must live to give real answers to real questions, wholesome food to spiritual hunger, and the Church will do a great work in the long run. She may do it slowly, she may be a long time, but in the long run of things he who has kept by Christ and replied to the deep necessities of human life will have done a far greater work than he who gives himself up to the mere amusement of coarse vulgarity or to the entertainment and tickling of people who would not care the snap of a finger if he were damned to-morrow.

It comes, then, to be a very sober question. On talking to people as a Christian teacher, I say What is it you want? A sign? You can't have it. A miracle? It

will not be done. ‘I want to see something sensational and exciting.’ It shall not be shown you. What would you have? A lesson in truth? There is plenty of room in the school. “I would see more deeply into myself.” Then God will hold the light for you. “I would be pure as God is pure.” He wants to give his Holy Spirit to them that desire the gift. “I would be wise unto salvation.” Then his book is brought out, opened before you, and written in your own mother tongue. He went to Solomon once along a pathway of darkness, where the king had lain down to rest; and the Lord found a way into the chamber where the royal head was pillowled, and said, “What wilt thou?” What a chance! what an opportunity! “What wilt thou? Ask what thou wilt.” And the king, inexperienced but earnest, said, “Give thy servant an understanding heart.” Given in a moment! And God said: “Because thou hast not asked of me length of days, riches, honour, but an understanding heart, I will give thee these things thou hast not asked,—throw them in like dust of comparatively little value. I will give thee a wise and understanding heart, and as for length of days and riches and honour and fame, in the light of thy lustre every other glory shall be but a flickering spark. Thou shalt be set up on high among the nations.” What is it you want? “I want to have satisfaction about to-morrow; I want to know the difficulties that will come upon me twelve months hence.” You cannot have it. No. What do you want? “I want the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” Take the kingdom of heaven and his righteousness, and all these things—poor little pendants—shall be added to thee. He who gets the greatest, gets the least also. He who gets truth, gets everything that belongs to that great kingdom; he who gets love, gets all the details of the life; he who gets God, gets all!

What do you want? "I want to-night to linger on the love of Christ. I feel I want deeper knowledge of truth, deeper knowledge of human nature, a keener sense of the presence of God in all the way that I take; nobler sympathy with truth, with divinity, with human weakness, with human sorrow, with human joy,—I want all these things." God says, "My child, take them,—take them all!"

NOTE.

Several of these Sermons were delivered in Exeter Hall, and are printed from the transcribed notes of the reporter. I have not struck out the local allusions, because in my judgment they in no degree detract from the interest of the sermons. Such discourses must in no sense be regarded as literary compositions; they represent a free, informal, direct, and evangelistic style of address. Now that I peruse them after an interval of more than five-and-twenty years, they recall many an earnest wrestling with the souls of men.

V

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.

"Be it known unto you that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins."—ACTS xiii. 38.

(Delivered in Exeter Hall.)

"BE it known unto you that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins"—not the forgiveness of crimes. So many people fail to distinguish between crime and sin. Crime is one thing and sin is another. There may be sin where there is not what is generally known as crime. But there cannot be crime as between man and man without a great offence having been committed as between man and God. Crimes are social ; crime lies between man and man, between man and society, between man and human law. The magistrate takes note of crime. Crime can be measured, weighed—can be pronounced upon and have adequate punishment meted out to it. But sin—who knows the nature thereof? and who has a line fine enough to measure it, or an eye penetrating enough to see it as it really is? None but God only. I can forgive a crime ; but I have no jurisdiction in the province of sin. Have you ever done me wrong, and do you say, "It is so ; I mourn it ; I repent of it ; and I offer to give you amendment in any form you please to fix"? I can on the spot say, "There is an end of it." But after you have settled the account with me, you must have some plain talk with

God. So far as you and I are concerned there is an end of the matter ; you have done all that honour and decency and human morality require to be done ; but when you wronged me, you also wronged God. The contest, therefore, is not limited as between you and me : it has religious bearings as well as personal aspects ; it goes upward and onward towards God, and the man must speak of the sin to his Maker as he has spoken of the crime to the offended man.

Herein, then, is a lesson for some. We suppose that if a man has suffered six months' imprisonment for having committed a crime, there is an end of the iniquity ; we may, at the expiration of the time, open the prison door and welcome him back again into society. Even were that so, the man has yet to make a penitential statement to God, to the eternal righteousness, the infinite purity, because any punishment that may have been meted out to him as in reference to his social crime does not touch the state and quality of his heart. Understand, therefore, in the light of these explanations, that the text points directly to the forgiveness of sins. Here is a gospel which finds its way into the heart, which goes beyond all action, all crime, all overt character, and speaks the word of redemption and healing and hope to the heart of man. It is a glorious gospel then. Because, after I have apologised to you for having done you wrong, I have still a grievous discontent with myself. I bless you for your extended hand, I am glad you have met me nobly and frankly ; but when I turn away and think of the matter, still in my own heart I feel self-dishonoured, self-reproachful, self-discontented ; I cannot be at rest ; I have done a mean, a dishonourable, a wrong thing ; and though you have accepted my penitence, yet there is

disquiet in my very heart. How to get clear of that? And whilst I am debating this serious question, and when I am at the very point of agony and despair, a sweet voice says to me, "Be it known unto you that through Jesus Christ the Son of God is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." I long to hear more of that; I would be assured of that glorious declaration; I ask the great Speaker to speak it again, lest I may have misinterpreted a single syllable of his speech—a speech too glorious for mortal to speak. Let me hear it again, I pray thee, that I may fully comprehend thy meaning! "Be it known unto you," then is the repetition, "that through this man Christ Jesus is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." That is the very word which a self-convicted, sin-burdened soul most eagerly desires to hear. Yet there is something to be supplied there, in order to complete the sense of this statement, and what requires to be supplied is this: a man must have seen and have felt the bitterness and the guiltiness of sin as between him and God before he can feel his need of such a gospel as is declared in the text. Do you care to trust a man who sets light by any form of wrongdoing? Do you care to speak your heart's deepest confidences to him? Have you any wish to make a friend of him? He can cheat the poor, and laugh himself out of it. Is he the kind of man to understand any spiritual declaration you may make to him? No! He is in a wrong state of mind, his heart is in a false condition; whatever you say that is spiritually true and noble is lost upon him—it is as a pearl thrown before swine. But let him feel that he has done wrong, let him be covered with the blushing shame of self-conviction, let him hang down his head like a man that knows himself to be worthy of nothing but condemnation,—then his conscience is in the right state, and his

heart is in the right condition for hearing the gentle and truthful word spoken. It is so with this gospel. It is no gospel to the man who does not understand sin ; it is a gospel only to those who have known the sinfulness of sin,—who have tried, by many a river side, or in the midst of many a sea, to wash themselves clean, and declare that not a stain is removed, not a blemish is remedied. It is to such, in that right state of mind, that this gospel of the forgiveness of sins comes as the very music and speech of God. A man cannot come upon this gospel theoretically, artistically, or controversially, and so get at its vital grace. Who, then, does touch the life of the gospel, the very vitality of the truth and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ ? The penitent man, the heart that is filled with shame and self-distrust, the soul that says, “I have no help in myself ; is there any redemption in the living God ?” Let a man reach that state of mind, and the Cross becomes heaven to him. Let a man be in that state of feeling, and the gospel is to him no longer a high controversy, a great theological feat ; it is the utterance of love, the cry of God seeking his lost child, a prayer that he answers by the tears of his penitence and the pledges of his trust.

In making this statement I lay all who are not yet forgiven under a tremendous responsibility. I should like to be well understood. A man cannot come and hear a gospel sermon and be the same after it as he was before it. I would I could say that well. I think it would arrest some men ; it would set fire to some understandings, and make some hearers pause awhile and think seriously. A man cannot hear a gospel sermon and be as little responsible afterwards as he was before he heard it. Let me explain that and urge it.

Let me suppose that you are now on one side of a great, swollen, turbid river, and that you want to get home, and that in order to do so you must cross the rushing waters. But you cannot: you have looked and tried and consulted one with another, and there is the great, tumultuous difficulty in front of you, and you cannot grapple with it. I come to you and say, "Be it known to you, who wish to go home, that I have found a bridge." The very fact of my having told you so alters the complexion of the whole case. You must prove me a liar before you can get back to your former state and condition of negative responsibility. You are bound to say, "Where?" I am bound to tell you where; and if after having pointed out the bridge—majestic, broad, high, free—you will not go home, then those you have left on the other side have a right to summon you to judgment and to condemn your conduct. Brethren, you are not on one side of a swollen river; but you are on one side and truth is on the other. How to get back to truth? What lies between? An infinite distance apparently. And there is amongst us to-night a man, an Apostle chosen of Jesus Christ—a strong-headed, single-hearted, earnest, glorious man—who says, "I tell you how the case stands! We are sinners, and Jesus Christ the Son of God is the way to forgiveness." What are we bound to do? This: to disprove the statement, or accept it. If not, what then? To die!

Shall I next regard you as suffering under some great plague? Have you spent your living upon physicians, and grown not better, but worse? I come to you and say, "Be it known unto you—every sufferer amongst you—that I have found a balm which has never failed: touch it and you will live." Your state of responsibility

is changed from that very moment. What becomes you then? Prove me false, or accept the remedy, or die. Granted that you have never heard the announcement before, then you are to be pitied. Suppose that you have tried every other so-called remedy, and you are fast sinking, then God himself might weep over you. That is one side of affairs; but the other side is this: we are dying, we are sinful, and Jesus Christ is set forth as the forgiveness of sins. No man, therefore, can hear the statement, or any statement equal to it, and be just the same after it as he was before. I charge you, therefore, in the name of God, and in the presence of the holy angels, with having heard that every sinner may be saved !

How little is this word "forgiveness" understood! Yet, is there a man amongst us who supposes for a moment that he does not know the meaning of it? Some do understand fully all that is implied in the term "forgiveness." To them I have nothing at this moment to say. Let me, however, acting upon the impression that there may be some here who do not understand the meaning of the word "forgiveness," proceed to explain it. There cannot be forgiveness until there has been the consent of two parties. We sometimes have said, in our ignorance, "Why does not God forgive all men and make an end of sin?" He cannot. You yourself cannot. It is a moral impossibility. There is an immoral nobleness. Do you care nothing for sin? Then you are immoral. Do you treat crime lightly? Then you are not to be trusted with the interests of society. Do you regard man as being equally worthy of confidence whatever may be his moral condition? Then your voice ought never to be heard in the counsels of the family or in the deliberations of the country. You are morally unsafe; you are morally

diseased ; you are attainted ; you are guilty of high treason against the throne of society. But how can forgiveness take place ? Thus : we must be willing to be forgiven—then the great transaction is completed ! I may say to you, if you have wronged me, "Sir, I forgive you." And you may laugh in my face and say, "Forgive ! take your forgiveness away ; who wants it ? I spit upon you !" Forgiveness is not a one-sided affair. There must be consent of parties. This is plainly declared in the revelation of divine truth. "If we *confess*"—mark the emphasis—"if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Did he forgive the Pharisee ? How could he ? The Pharisee confessed nothing. He paid tithes, he fasted twice in the week, he resented the charge of extortion and adultery, and made himself out to be a respectable and honourable man. Whom did He forgive ? The poor, dejected, self-accusing creature who dared not so much as lift his eyes to heaven, but who smote upon his breast and said, "God be merciful to me a sinner !" Who was forgiven ? The man who said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven," and the moment he said so the whole past was met. So it is with us. Our hearts must be melted into contrition ; there must be tears of penitence in our very hearts ; there must be a sob of contrition, a sigh of self-accusation, an utter renunciation of self-help. Then will take place, in the name of Christ, and at the foot of the Cross of Christ, the great transaction which liberates men from the captivity of sin !

When God forgives, what happens ? When God forgives, God forgets. "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." That is complete forgiveness. There is a common saying amongst ourselves, "I forgive

you, but I cannot forget what you have done." Where there is no forgetting, there is no forgiving. I do not refer to a mere intellectual fact in the memory; but I refer to the heart remembering. Not till the heart forgets has the heart forgiven. What does God do with our sins when he has forgiven them? He casts them behind him. Behind God? Yes. Where is that? How far does he put our sins and our iniquities from him? As far as the east is from the west. How far is that? They are figures—poor and lame, as all figures must be in such a case, which, however, are meant to indicate the utterness, the completeness, the grandeur of the great act of divine pardon. I can imagine some persons stumbling here and saying they really cannot understand it. Allow me to speak with you, please. You are not asked to understand it. It is precisely there that so many people get wrong. They want to understand things. We live by revelation, when we live deeply; we live by faith, when we live wholly. He who only lives with his understanding lives upon a little sharp point, when he might have the freedom of the universe. We are saved by love. Love, when truly understood, will be found but another term for faith—faith completed, faith alive, faith at its sublimest point. Which is the great commandment of the law? Thou shalt love. Which is the second law? Thou shalt love. Does any man feel, in his heart, love towards Jesus Christ? Through him is preached the forgiveness of sins. It is not necessary to understand these things, and to be able to argue about them, in order to get out of them all their grace and life and support. Speech is one thing; grammar is another. Life in Christ is one thing; theology is another. We are not good Englishmen because we are good grammarians; we are not good men because we are good debaters in theology. A man

may be an Englishman, though he cannot tell whether the Plantagenets or Tudors came the first, or who signed Magna Charta, or whether it was ever signed at all. Call him ignorant if you please, charge him with want of information if you like, but you don't destroy his nationality.

A little child says to his father, "Pa, me loves you great much"; and the father says, "You bad, bad little boy! Why, that is not grammar! What do you mean by talking so?" No, he loves the child almost the more for the bad grammar—it certainly takes nothing away from his love. There are a good many men in the Church, and others who ought to be in the Church, who talk bad grammar; but they have wonderful depth of real childlike love: and it is by love we are saved, not by grammar. You would teach the child exactly as I am teaching you religion. Suppose that you would not allow the child to speak a word until he is made to understand that the verb "to be" has the same case after it as it has before it; and if the child shall violate that elementary rule in syntax you put an end to all intercourse and withdraw all confidence. Why, you would be a fool! That is all. So it is in this matter of understanding forgiveness and grasping the theological bearings of things. It is as if a man, if such a case may be supposed, resolves that his child shall never speak till his child can speak grammatically. We grow up into these things; we advance in information. The one grand thing to be considered is this: Have you love? This is the basis of my appeal to-night. Here is forgiveness preached; and it has been explained that before forgiveness can take place there must be consent of parties. God is waiting,—that I am authorised to say. I should be no Christian teacher

if I were not entrusted with that instruction. I have come from his presence, and the last word he spoke to me is this, "I wait to be gracious ; tell them so." Are you ready ? "But I do not understand." Sir ! your understanding will damn you, if you use it so ! Do you feel your need ? Do you feel the sting of sin, the bitterness of guilt, the death that is in every iniquity ? "Yes, I do." Then through this man is preached unto you this doctrine : Sin can be forgiven. "What have I to do in reply to that ?" Believe ! "But what is belief ?" Love. "But nothing else ?" Wait and grow into all that is beside and additional, but accept the very first love-throb of thy heart ; work with that ; begin there and grow into all the rest.

I understand the Apostle to tell us distinctly to-night that there is only one way. He does not say that there are a thousand ways of being forgiven and I have come to explain one of them. He speaks conclusively and finally ; he speaks as if a great revelation had been made to him. "Be it known to you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." If there were but one door to this hall, and a thousand persons wished to enter the hall, and a guide said, "This is the door," I can conceive it quite possible for numbers of people not to believe him, and to be trying to get in by windows that are too high, and to be running round the building seeking to see if there was not another door somewhere. But when a man says to me plainly, "This is the door," I save time, and promote my own comfort by believing the man and acting upon his declaration. And I am bound to do so, unless I have good evidence to the contrary, or strong and reasonable suspicion that the man is misleading me. "But the

Apostle is only one man!" Let us grant that; and I call five hundred men to his side. I sound a trumpet and call ten thousand men to endorse it; and when they have endorsed it I blow the trumpet again, and call for countless millions of men to endorse it—all Heaven endorses it; the glorious company of the apostles, the noble army of martyrs, the Holy Church throughout all the earth, endorse it! There is no mistake about this matter. We are not deceiving ourselves. We have an interest keen and deep in this doctrine, and having looked into it we are bound to say that not until we knew this man, this Nazarene, this Jesus Christ and his doctrine, did we know that sin could be forgiven. Think of it. It does appear to be infinitely impossible that sin can ever be rubbed out. No sponge ever found amongst the rocks can rub it out; no water ever gushing from deepest springs or falling from highest clouds can rub it out or wash it away. But the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin, gets into the secret places of our heart, finds out our hidden iniquities and our concealed desires, and works its gracious ministry there, until we become without spot or wrinkle or any such thing—a glorious Church! Are your sins many? His grace is more. Are your sins aggravated? He delights to show the greatness of His grace.

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." Was Paul chief? Yes. So am I; and every man feels himself to be chief when he feels himself a sinner. This is a great mystery. But it is impossible for any man who sees sin as it really is to believe that any other man ever committed such sins as those of which he accuses himself. So it is right for every

man to call himself chief of sinners—not chief of criminals, not chief of social offenders, not chief of culprits. Many of us, thank God, can turn away and say, “We are not chief of criminals” in the magisterial sense of the term ; but who can turn aside and deny his being chief when the question is one of sin against God’s light and God’s love and God’s dear Son ? In the hours of our self-conviction and deepest, keenest contrition we have no time or disposition to think of what other people have done ; there is forced upon us this bitter and terrible accusation, “ You are chief of sinners ! ” and the heart takes it up and says with bitterness and mourning, “ Yes, I am.”

Do not delude yourselves,—you, who need this exhortation—with the fact, which is a fact to be thankful for,—that you are not the chief of criminals. Crime is a limited term ; crime is not in this case at all. It is a question of spiritual relation to God, spiritual condition, heart condition. Look at it in that light, and God give you grace until your hearts are pained, tormented, agonised, and then that second grace, which says sweetly, “ Your iniquity is forgiven.”

VI.

RELIGIOUS LOOKS.

"Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them."—GEN. xv. 5.

THIS is the look to nature. The great nature book was meant to be read. We are surrounded by emblems and symbols and types and helps; yet how little use we make of all this machinery of spiritual learning! The Lord puts arithmetic itself to shame. We can only count up to a given number. We speak of theology dealing with unknowable subjects; so does arithmetic. You can say "million," but you do not know what you say. You can say "God," and know just as little. Both the words fill the imagination, and put all our powers of conception to shame. The Lord has made some things innumerable, yet they are not therefore useless. Where our senses give way a larger faculty comes into operation. When we are tired of counting, God says, "That will do, poor little child; thou hast not so much as begun the infinite tale; I only wanted to show thee that some things may be unthinkable and yet not unuseable, unknowable and yet not unprofitable, endless and by their very endlessness full of tender comfort.' So we bring "the power of an endless life," a circle life—for a circle has no end—to bear upon the vexation and fret and care and pain and wonder of this initial

and ever-vanishing sphere. Beautiful is this exhortation to Abram : " Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them." Every look to Mother Nature should make us strong. No man should pass through a green field in the summer-time without feeling softened, refined, tranquillised ; there is so much of the fulness of God in the growing grass. There may be people who climb mountains for no reason they could give for the climbing ; but no sensitive man can climb a hill and keep his eyes sullenly on the ground. The hills are altars, the high places of the earth are as stairways or mountains, till other stairs be added to them and all heaven thus becomes our own. The Lord is still making this same appeal to us : " Look now toward the east, toward the west, the north, the south ; look now upon all nature, and say—" Then God gives us liberty to theorise and moralise and poetise ; he supplies the material, and says, " Now, in that marble find the breathing bust." The Lord will have us co-workers ; he asks at our hands co-operation. He does not grow busts, he grows marble. My chisel could find no bust in that quarried stone, but another man's chisel can find angels there ; that other man is my elder brother, my minister, the poet of my soul. So with the Bible ! We cannot all read it with equal intelligence and equal perception and equal appreciation. Some men read the book, and it is nothing but a series of sentences ; whereas other men read the book, and the sentences fall into rhythm and music and gospel ; and we say to such gifted voices, " Read on for ever." So there is a power of looking at nature and seeing much in it. Look now toward the heavens when all the stars are glittering, and say, " In my Father's house are many mansions." That is a right deduction. In speaking so we are speaking wisdom and

poetry. Verily there is room enough in all that galaxy of worlds for all sorts of men and angels. We shall be sorted accordingly. The Lord will not distribute us indiscriminately. I see great stars yonder, and little stars, some almost ruby, some tinted with green, and some so white as to be all but holy. There may be room up yonder even for the worst of us. They all look beautiful. Look now toward the starry heavens, and believe that God has chambers enough, mansions enough, space enough into which to distribute all manner of creation, and be comforted. If he had but one star, and all the populations of the world had to go into it, we might be filled with a kind of religious despair ; but see, there are thousands and tens of thousands, and every new telescope brings back the gospel that beyond the known universe there is another universe. Look now and say, "In my Father's house there are many mansions." Look towards your own little earth : it would not be so little if the stars were not so many ; it would be quite large but for these infinite palaces of light, that make it so small by contrast. Really, taken in itself it is some five-and-twenty thousand miles round. That cannot be a small wedding-ring. It is a beautiful little place ; we need not be ashamed of it. Look now toward the earth, and say, "There is land enough for everybody ; every man might have a garden here." Look now at the harvest-fields, at the great plains of America, at the wondrous tens of thousands of acres drawn out in unmeasured lines, and say, "There should be no poverty ; famine should be a forgotten word, distress an unremembered tragedy." Look now : it is an earth of green fields and coloured gardens, and limpid streams and generous rivers, and oceans willing to be made into highways for the commerce of the nations. There, then, is the invitation. Look to the stars, look to the worlds,

look to the lilies, look to the fowls of the air, look to the grass of the field, look to kind, sweet old Mother Nature, and say if she has not in her lap Christmas gifts for all : and she does not turn away the worst ; nay, she may turn her own kind eyes aside a moment when the very worst comes up, and shed a tear, part anger, almost all pity, but she does not send away any empty hand. Look ! Let Nature plead ; let the acres testify ; let the worlds show the purpose of God.

Is that the only look ? Is there not another quite as religious ? " And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us " (Acts iii. 4). This is the look to man. That is a natural look ; there is reason in that observation. This is the cry of the Church to everybody when the Church is in the right mood and temper, filled with the Spirit of her Lord. " Look on us." Men have a right to look to people who go to temples. Lame men have a right to be on the church step. Other buildings may or may not permit them, but the church was built for lame people, for hurt lives, for crushed hearts, for beclouded souls. Let respectability hasten to its museum or to its place of entertainment, to its gallery of art, to its haunts of science, all of which may be able to contribute substantially to human education and human progress ; but smitten folks, halt, maimed, blind, palsied, beggared, damned—the church was built for them ; and if any Pharisee is in it, he is taking up room which does not belong to him. It is wonderful how wisdom and folly fall from those marvellous lips of Peter. None could be so far astray, none so precise and definite in holy eloquence.

And Peter . . . said, Look on us," expect something from us ; expect the greatest gift of all : silver none, gold none. The Church does not give what other people

give ; the Church through its Lord gives " life " : stand up and beg no more ! The Church should bring life—not, " We will give you that which perishes in the using " ; but, " In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, we will give you the power to help yourselves, we will give you life ; we will cure the ankle, we will not merely fill the hand." So the Christian Church ought to stand out as the foremost of institutions, the true arbiter, the divine regulator of society. Are approaches and interchanges of good feeling valueless ? Nothing of the kind. For the moment they may be most welcome and most important and most useful ; within their own lines they are only to be spoken of with commendation ; but looking to the largeness and the lastingness of things, we want a living principle, a divine life,—and this principle and this life are revealed in Christ Jesus alone. That is the Christian creed, that is the faith in which we should all wish to work and stand. The weak man has a right to look to the strong man. What right has he ? The right of your strength. If you see a weak person wronged by a strong one, the weak person belongs to you by his very weakness. If you see a child overborne by a tyrant, that child instantly becomes your boy ; you are his father, and you must protect him. Why, even a beast of the field has many a time looked to a man for refuge when pursued by other beasts. I can never forget a little bird, that would have been afraid of me under ordinary circumstances, hovering near me and, as it were, asking for hospitality. I could not understand the appeal until I saw the hawk poised high in air. The little bird had a right to look to me ; and if a bird, hawk-followed, threatened with the stroke of death, has a right to look to man, how much more that little child, that poor man, that poor old woman that might have been my own mother ! As long

as I have a loaf, poverty has a right to part of it. I know there are fine distinctions drawn between respectable poverty and self-inflicted poverty: but we cannot be metaphysical in the presence of overwhelming sorrow. It is delightful to retire to the summer-house at the foot of the garden and sit by the purling river, and turn human circumstances into metaphysical reasonings; but when these circumstances are at the door and smiting the door with the fist of appeal and urgency, what we have to do is to deal with the circumstances first and dose over the metaphysics afterwards.

Is there any more looking to be done? Here is another exhortation: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" (Isa. xlvi. 22). That is a look to God. We are getting up in this process of survey. Look now to the heavens, or to nature; look on us, or to man; look unto me, the look upward, the look all-saving. That is a generous appeal on the part of God. "Look and be saved." When was love ever so willing to simplify processes? God never encumbers the soul with long and tedious ways of escape. The Lord hath taken out of our language, our own very mother tongue, just little words that children could carry and remember and repeat, and he has fixed everything upon the use of such words. "Look" is one; "come" is one; "believe" is one; "draw near" is another—and they are all such common words. What is so common as water? Yet the world could never quench its thirst on wine. What is so common as bread? Yet hunger could never appease itself on confectionery. When we live at all we live on simplicity, on things elementary. So with these great looks to nature, to man, to God. If we can but turn our eyes in the right direction, the act will be regarded as faith, and will be

crowned with peace. Poor soul ! thou canst at all events "look" toward God. I come to thee in Christ's dear name and say, "Poor blind soul, turn thy sightless eyeballs in the right direction ; if thou canst see nothing, yet the very turning will express a desire, and such desire was never left unsatisfied by the condescending Christ." That is all. What you want to do is to argue. You may be cursed with disputatiousness ; you may want long words, difficult processes of reasoning ; and you vainly want an intellectual ladder up to heaven. There is none. The only way to heaven is the way of simplicity—the look of the soul, the cry of the heart, "Come to me, thou Son of God, for I cannot come to thee ; I am laden, I am lost. Saviour, come."

Shall Peter speak, and John say nothing ? Has John no "look," no appeal for the use of the soul's eyes ? 2 John 8—a one-chaptered epistle, but in it occurs the words, "Look to yourselves." That is the want of every day. We are so apt to be looking to other people as to forget we need a little self-inspection and self-criticism. Sydney Smith says, "I will do human nature the justice to say that we are all anxious that others should do their duty." John says, "Look to yourselves." What about home ? What about your own heart—your own temper ? When you criticise others you aggravate your own iniquity ; if you had a kind soul you would have kind eyes, you would see more virtue in the world than ever you have seen before. There is a genius that sees the bright side of things. The man who is most severe with himself will be most gentle to others. Hear a man with a file of a tongue, exasperating, rasping, offensive, and you find a man who has not paid much attention to himself. Find a man hopeful, gentle, pacific, conciliatory, gracious,

a man who says, "This little gutter-child may one day be Prime Minister of England, he may be a downright honest soul; who can tell what is in that little child?" and you will find a man who is full of the Spirit of Christ. We ought to see in other people something that is lovely; and if we do not we should inquire how far is the fault in ourselves. The apostles, following the teaching of their Lord, insist upon self-criticism, self-analysis, self-severity. Have not some of us so cut ourselves to pieces that sometimes we have not dared to pray? Every fibre seemed to be so bad that there was nothing in us that could be saved. And has not that been a time of revelation on the part of God, a revelation of divine grace and sustenance and comfort and inspiration and gathering? Oh, that sweet, tender, caressing word—"gathering"! "With everlasting mercies will I gather thee." It is an action of the arm, it is a drawing of us to the warm heart. Be severe with thyself if thou wouldest be gentle to others.

There are more "lookings" in the Bible. We might continue upon this line, but there is one that must not be omitted. It is the look which is called for by Christ himself. "Look," said Jesus in John iv. 35, "on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." That is a look in the direction of opportunities. The fields were ready; why were not these men going forth to reap? The opportunity is at hand; why stand ye here all the day idle?

Opportunities! Have you spoken to your own friends, servants, workmen, children? The fields are already white unto the harvest. Who shall respond to all these calls? Look now toward heaven, the look to nature;

look on us, the look to man; look unto me, the look to God; look to yourselves, the inspection of the soul conducted in secret; look unto the fields, the look to opportunities. There need be no idle man,—whet your sickles, go out, and cut the waiting harvest. May the Lord look upon us with eyes of ineffable tenderness, and help us to look upon him with reverent expectation! Jesus “looked,” and “saw,” and “said.” So it is reported in the picturesque story of Zacchæus. Many “look” who do not “see,” many “see” who do not “say.” The process should be continued and completed if we would follow the divine example of our Lord and Master. Let us look away from ourselves—away to the far-shining Cross, away to the ascended Lord, away from the guilt to the Sacrifice provided for its removal. Let every man pray, “Lord, that I may receive my sight,” then the whole heaven will glow as a vision of living splendour, and the soul will begin to know somewhat of the joy of its Lord.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we humbly thank thee for every word of hope which thou hast spoken to the heart of man. Thou hast set us indeed in a strange place. This earth is full of trouble. Life is often a torment, and the future is clothed with darkness. But when thou dost come to us thou bringest light and rest and hope. Thou teachest us that how strange soever may be the conditions and events of our life, all things are for our sakes. We are oppressed by this revelation, yet do we rejoice in it, for though thou dost thereby clothe us with great responsibility, and enrich us with the highest privileges, and call us to holiness in the Lord, yet thou dost also give us grace and sufficiency of strength to meet the days as they come upon us, and to do our duty in unfailing power. We bless thee that there is a promise of heaven to the weary pilgrims of time who put their trust in Jesus Christ. We bless thee for the sweet promise. The very name of heaven is music in our ears; we say it to our hearts in their trouble and unrest, and our hearts are quieted thereby. We remind ourselves that this is not our rest. We seek a country of promise, a city of light. Then are we strong in the Lord, and our courage is revived. Thou dost give us wings to bear us away from the darkness and trouble of time. This house is a hint of heaven; thy sanctuary is an intermediate resting-place. May we meet thee here to-day, speak with thee as a man speaketh to his friend, and receive from thee such communications of thy grace as are calculated to recover our strength, revive and establish our hope and love. Thou hast done great things for us, whereof we are glad. In our home thou hast set the signal of thy mercy; in our business thou hast blessed us in basket and in store; thou hast preserved our bodily strength; thou hast kept us in the possession of our reasoning faculties; thou hast surrounded us with mercy upon mercy, countless and precious! What shall we render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards us? Receive our thanksgiving, so far as words can express our gratitude, and cause us to feel the inexpressible

thankfulness which never can be uttered in mortal speech,—the thankfulness of our whole heart, expressed in the consecration of our whole life. We are sinners. God be merciful unto us! We come to the Saviour's Cross; we look unto the Lamb of God; we lay our hand upon the one Sacrifice. God be merciful unto us! We cannot justify our ways before God. We have no reasons to set in order before thee to vindicate our conduct wherein it has been contrary to thy most holy word. We shut our mouth, we lay our hand upon it, we bow ourselves down into the dust. If we might say ought before thee, we would say, "Unclean, unclean!" But if we confess our sins, thou art faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Undertake that work. Sanctify us, body, soul, and spirit. May our whole nature be pure. May every aspiration, affection, desire, be sanctified by the Holy Ghost. May our whole strength be an offering unto the Lord's service, accepted because offered on the Cross of the Lord Jesus. Thou hast added another week unto our years; thou hast taken another week from our life upon the earth. Help us to live in Christ, then our life cannot be measured by time. May our heart be in Christ's keeping. May our whole life be hidden with Christ in God, then eternity itself can never waste our energy or impair our perfect beauty. Come to us now according to our want. To the hunger of our soul do thou apply the bread of heaven. To the burning, consuming thirst of our love and highest nature do thou apply the water of the river of life. Revive the drooping. May they look up where they cannot stand up. May they feel thy presence and submit to thy rule. Dry the tears of our sorrow. Explain thou to us, if so be we may thereby be stronger in the Lord and in the power of his might; if not, help us to believe in the future, where there is no sorrow because no sin, where there is complete, ever-enduring rest. Look upon thy servants who have to face the world day by day,—whose life is often a battle, whose battle is often a failing strife, whose hearts are discouraged, and whose strength is wasted. Give them thy grace, work in them thy peace, and give them hope. Look upon thy servants who seem to carry everything before them; who speak, and it is done; who command, and it stands fast; who dream themselves into success; who put forth the finger, and carry all things as they will. This is a great temptation: who can bear it? Our success endangers us, if our roots be not fixed in God, if our love and our faith be not established in Jesus Christ. Teach thy servants that all this world can give is but a splendid nothing. Show

them that if the whole world were at their feet it would ultimately fall away and leave them without possession and without rest. May we set our affections on things above. May we look at things not seen. May we dominate over time and sense, and even now sit down in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Bless all households and family circles. May heads of houses walk in their houses with a perfect heart. May all little children early give themselves of their own accord to Jesus the Son of God. May masters rule gently. May servants serve faithfully. May the rich be humble, genial, liberal, noble, incapable of meanness, holding all selfishness in holy contempt. May the poor be delivered from all envy, jealousy, covetousness, discontent, and despair. May the whole world be touched by thy light, and united in the one brotherhood which is found in the love of Christ. As for our native land, peace be within her borders! As for her palaces, wherein they represent righteousness, purity, equity, and progress towards heaven, bless their inmates and prosper their counsels. Break the rod of the tyrant. Upset the counsel of the fool. Break the teeth of the madman and take his power away. Reign thou, whose right it is. Overturn, overturn, overturn, till everywhere kings shall be lost in the King, and lords in the Lord, and there shall be one name and one love! Amen.

VII.

THE PREPARED PLACE.

"I go to prepare a place for you."—JOHN xiv. 2.

THERE are two remarkable things about this statement. First of all, that the master should prepare for the servant. This upsets the ordinary course of procedure. You are expecting to entertain some chosen friends. All your appointments are made; you have sent before your face servants in whom you have confidence, and have told them to do as you have commanded, that all things may be in readiness for the invited guests. This is customary; this is considered right. But Jesus Christ says to his servants—such poor, incomplete, and

blundering servants, too,—“I, your Lord and Master, go to prepare a place for you.” This is quite in keeping with the method which Jesus Christ adopted in his ministry. This is no exceptional instance of condescension, self-ignoring, self-humiliation. “He took a towel, girded himself, and washed his disciples’ feet and dried them,” and having finished this lowly exhibition, he said, “If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another’s feet. I have given you an example.” So his whole life was a humiliation. Wherever he was on earth, he was, so to speak, out of place; if his method be measured by his original and essential dignity, his whole life was a stoop, his whole ministry a godlike condescension. So, why did we begin our discourse by saying it was a remarkable thing that the servant should be prepared for by the master? Only remarkable when looked at in the light of our little standards and false relations; but quite in keeping, perfectly and purely in harmony, with that divine condescension which marked, ruled, and glorified our dear Christ’s ministry.

The second remarkable thing about the text is, that the divine being, God the Son, should ever have occasion to “prepare” anything. To prepare may signify to get ready, to put things in order, to look after arrangements, appointments, and the like, so as to have all things in due proportion and relation, that the eye may be pleased, that the ear may be satisfied, and that all our desires may be met and fulfilled. Why, Jesus Christ talks in the text as if there was a good deal of work for him to do somewhere, and he must make haste and get it done. Go to prepare? Can he who fills infinitude and breathes eternity have anything to do in the way of arranging and

ordering and getting things ready for his servants? He accommodates himself to our modes of thinking. He does not always throw the infinite at us! He often steps out of his tabernacle of glory and talks our own speech,—makes a child of himself that he may be understood in this little rickety nursery of a world. He knows we are all in the cradle still, that the mightiest speaker amongst us is only a lisping babbler, and that he must continually break up his words and turn himself downwards, in order that he may convey the very dimmest hint of his unutterable meaning!

There are some things which the Master only can do. Will you go and prepare summer for us? You might try. You have seen half a hundred summers: now you go and try to make the fifty-first! Come! You are an artificer: you have the organ of form largely developed; you have an eye for beauty; you can buy oils and paints and colours and canvas and brushes of all kinds. Why don't you go and prepare summer for us? The great Master, looking down upon this little under-world of his—this basement-story of his great building—says, “I am going to prepare the summer for you.” And he makes no noise, he makes no mistakes in his colours, never gets things into discord. He continually renews the face of the earth, and not a man in all the busy, boastful world can do it! If the servant cannot prepare the summer, how could he prepare heaven? If the saint exhausts himself when he lights a candle, how could he fill the great heavens with the morning that should never melt into sunset?

Observe, therefore, that always the servant has to wait for the master. He can only go as he has example set before him. The servant has no original ideas. The

servant is not a voice,—often an echo, muddled, indistinct. I would that we could reflect very deeply on that point,—that every now and then in life we have to stand back, and let the Master go out before us. We can do a hundred and fifty little things, and multiply the hundred and fifty by ten, and double that number, and we actually get into the notion at last that we can do anything. When you have made one little rosebud, advertise it, and we will come and look at it. When you have made one new plant, let us hear where it is to be seen, and we shall examine it. "Canst thou command the morning?" "Canst loose the bands of Orion?" Art thou known by the Pleiades? Canst thou open the gate of the Milky Way? What art thou?

This text gives three intensely gratifying, comforting, and inspiring views of the Christian believer's position and destiny. The Christian believer is the object of Jesus Christ's zealous and tender care. When Jesus Christ was going away, he said to his wondering disciples, "It is expedient for you that I go." When he addressed them on the occasion of the text, he said, "I go to prepare a place for myself"? No! "For you." And the Apostle Paul, catching his Master's sublime tone, said, "All things are yours." And Peter, thunder-tongued, cried out, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which has begotten us again into a lively hope by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away!" Yet we hang our heads like whipped dogs, and moan and cry and fret and chafe as if we had nothing, unless we had it in our hand and could lace our fingers around it,—not knowing that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

Wherever you find Jesus Christ you find him working for his people,—doing something for those who believe in him and love him. “He ever liveth to make intercession for us.” There is a beautiful necessity of love about this arrangement. For if he were to fail here,—fail in training, educating, sanctifying the Church,—he would fail altogether. What if he has made countless millions of stars? Can the stars talk to him? Can he get back the idea which he gave? Can he have sympathy with form, substance, glory, majesty, as found in mere matter? If he does not get us—poor, broken things—right into his blue, glad heaven, he has failed! That is the one work which he set himself to do. If he drops one poor little child out of his great arms because he has not capacity and strength enough, he could never be happy in his heaven. Think of this: Christ always thinking for us, caring for us, going out in all the passion of his love after us, and then say whether the Church ought always to have tears in her eyes and never to have peace in her heart!

Not only are Christian believers constant objects of Jesus Christ's most zealous and tender care, but they are to be eternally his joy. “I go to prepare a place for you.” The plain meaning of that is, fellowship, residence together in common. He said afterwards, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also,”—giving us the idea of permanence, continuity of residence, and fellowship. We do some things for the moment. It is enough for God if he limit April to thirty days; he does not want it on the thirty-first day; it ceases, and goes back into his great heaven, and May begins. He does not bring back Eighteen Seventy into Eighteen

Seventy-one, and say, "There, I have brushed it up for you, and made the best of it I can : you must try it again." No ; he takes the years, blows them away ; creates new ones ; never gives you an old leaf, or tells you to put a faded flower into water and try to get up its colours and its fragrance again. "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." "He fainteth not, neither is weary." As for these heavens, he will one day dismiss them. He will create a new heaven and a new earth. He will burn up and utterly destroy what he has made. He makes some things for the time being ; but wherever we read of the place prepared for Christian believers, we have the idea of continuous, enduring time—never-ending fellowship. All true life is in the heart. Love alone is immortal. "God is love." We shall drop argument, logic, controversy, letters, technicalities, pedantries of all sorts, tongues, prophecies, hope, faith itself, and only Love shall live for ever !

The world is made poor whenever it loses pathos. Whenever the emotional goes down, man goes down. Logic is but intermediate help ; it is but a poor ladder compared to heart, love, pathos, sensibility. Love must endure as God endureth. This is it which binds Christ and Christians—love. Love is knowledge. Love hath the key of interpretation. Love can explain what learning can never fathom. Love knoweth the Lord afar off,—beyond the stormy deep, in the far-away desert, in the night-time dark and cold. Love can see the invisible and touch the distant. Do we love Christ, or are we still in the beggarly region of mere controversy and cold intellectual inquiry? If we love him we shall be with him for ever.

Seeing that Christ makes the Christian believer the

object of his constant and zealous care, and that the Christian believer shall be for ever with his Lord, the Christian is entitled to look at the present through the medium of the future. The more we can bring the power of this love to bear upon the passing moments, the more we can look into the things which are seen and at the things which are not seen, and step out of eternity morning by morning, do our little paltry day's work, and go back again into God's pavilion. If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable. But we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Moses wondered on seeing the invisible. Jesus Christ teaches this most beautiful doctrine: that the Christian heart is not to be troubled, because in his Father's house are many mansions. So he brings down heaven to help up earth. He says, "When you are weary of the present, look forward to the future; when the road is steep and difficult and tortuous, think of the end and be thankful and glad." It is by this power we draw ourselves onward. We lay the hands of our expectant love on the golden bars of heaven, and draw ourselves forward thereby. Some of you know what I mean by that expression. You who have been in sickness and sorrow and loss, you who have been tired of looking downwards, and feel the very heart dying within you, when you saw nothing but this earth's narrow circumference, and then have had sudden visions of God's eternity and Christ's blessed immortality, you draw on yourself through all the care and sorrow and bitterness and unrest of time by loving, intelligent anticipation of eternity.

Now, if Christ has gone to prepare a place for the

Christian believer, what then? The place will be worthy of himself. Send a poor creature to prepare a place for you against to-morrow, and the place will be prepared according to the capacity and resources of the messenger. It is a poor person who has gone to prepare a place for you, therefore you will not see gold and silver, you will not have a sumptuous reception; but if the poor person has done all that she could, it is enough. You will see the intent of the preparation everywhere; every speck of dust that has been removed means, "I would put down gold there if I could." Every little thing, even a wild flower out of the hedgerow, put into a little glass that can hardly stand, means, "I would give you Paradise if I could." Every little deed that is done ought to be amplified by your grateful love, because it means so much more than it looks. But Jesus Christ says, "I go to prepare a place for you. I have made worlds, stars, planets, comets; I have sent forth the lightning and uttered the thunder. Now I am going to do my greatest deed of all. I am going to get a place ready for those whom I have bought with my blood and glorified by my Spirit." What kind of place will *he* get ready for us, who has all things at command,—when the silver and gold are his, when he can speak light, and command worlds to fashion themselves and shine upon his children? What kind of place will *he* get ready? You like to be prepared for. If the person preparing for you is poor, you take every little deed as a great deed. If the person preparing for you has ample resources and receives you as if, "Really, well you had come after all; but, at the same time, it would have been quite as well if you had lost your way," you naturally feel indignant, dissatisfied, resentful, because it might have been done nobly. Jesus Christ has gone to prepare a place. We judge men by the

capacity of their resources. We have seen what he has done. If he has loved us with unutterable love, he will enrich us with inconceivable glory. The riches which he has are called "the unsearchable riches of Christ." "Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what God hath prepared." "Come ye blessed of my Father, enter the kingdom prepared for you."

Preparation implies an interest in us, an expectation of us. He is waiting for his guests: he will open the door presently, and we shall go straight in. Bad man! who is preparing for you? God has prepared nothing for you. There is a place,—the pit of damnation, the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched!—but it was not prepared for you; it was prepared, Christ says, for "the devil and his angels." That is the only place he has to put you into! He made no preparation for you,—thought, perhaps, that at the very last moment you might turn and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Would not get anything ready for you! All that there is is the devil's pit of damnation,—never, never got ready for man—man, who was redeemed by the precious blood of Christ!

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, teach us that thy fear casts out all other fear; that whosoever thinks of thee thinks of all that is worthy of the powers with which thou hast blessed him. Teach us that to dismiss God from our thoughts is to plunge our minds into darkness, and to lose all the beauty and joy and peace of life. We rejoice that thou canst be thought about by mortal minds; that thou art infinite, eternal, immutable. Yet thou wilt dwell with the man whose heart is broken, whose spirit is contrite. Thou wilt not break the bruised reed, thou wilt not quench the smoking flax. Thou givest power even to the faint, and to them that have no might thou increasest strength. This is the condescension of God passing all understanding, meeting us in the abasement of our weakness and poverty, and supplying all our need out of his unsearchable riches. Even when our father and our mother forsake us, thou dost take us up. When we are a terror to ourselves thou dost show us the way of recovery, thou dost set up within us the standard of thy salvation, and thou redeemest with a great price. Thou renewest our life by rekindling our hope. We come now that we may worship thee with reverent hearts, with all thankfulness, with all love, with all trust. Accept our evening sacrifice and give us answers of peace. We would know thee more perfectly; we would distinctly see thee everywhere in life; we would know that the light of morning comes from God, that the shadows of the night are the gifts of thy love, that all we behold on the right hand and on the left is a witness of thy presence and thy care. All nature conspires to elevate thy name and pronounce thy praise. When we read the holy book which thou hast written for the instruction of mankind, we would see beyond the letter, we would commune with the spirit of the revelation which thou hast granted. We would know thee, not by the learning of the letter only, but by the higher scholarship of love, the keen penetration of sympathy. We would know thee afar off, and interpret by our hearts when all mere utterance fails. Thus may thy book be to us every day a new book, a continual revelation of thy mind and purpose. May we read therein with ever-heightening joy, drawing water out of the wells of salvation,

and find in the provisions of thy word more than all our hunger can ever need. May thy word dwell in us richly, as the answer to every difficulty, as the light of every dark hour, as the music of every lonely night, as the consolation of our sorrow and the deliverer of our souls,—so that we may have bread to eat which the world knoweth not of, and have consolations and power which the world can neither give nor take away. We would live deeply; we would have roots. Our life would be a hidden life, far away from the gaze and the influence of things temporal and visible! We would that our life might be hidden with Christ in God, so that all which men see may be beautiful with heavenly truth, lustrous with the purity of God, ever honourable, just, noble, and unimpeachable, because derived from daily communion with the eternal and the true. Hear us when we confess our sins! Hear the cry of those who are in sore distress by reason of intense consciousness of personal guilt! Show the penitent the way to the Cross of Christ! Say to those who are in despair, "Jesus Christ came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Help us to know the sinfulness of sin, and to hate iniquity as thou dost hate it. May we abstain from the appearance of evil. When heart and flesh do fail, may we show, by the strength of our resolution, the tenderness of our heart, and the elevation of our speech, that thou art our strength and portion. Strengthen every good man. Break the power of every evil mind. Uplift righteousness, virtue, truth, and mercy, and destroy, as thou only canst destroy, all evil, hypocrisy, chicanery, badness of every degree. Reign thou, whose right it is, and establish thy kingdom in all human hearts. Amen.

VIII.

LIMITATIONS.

"Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?"—MATT. vi. 27.

IT is well for men to think that there are some things which, with all their power, they cannot do. Some of these things are apparently very simple, yet, though simple and easy as in some cases they appear to be, cannot be done, even when men give the whole stress

and pith of their minds to the attempt. This is implied in the phraseology of the text: "Which of you by taking thought [by anxiously considering, by most perseveringly endeavouring, by straining his wit and strength to the very utmost, by spending his days and nights in the effort] can add one cubit unto his stature?" There are some difficult things which we can do by putting out all our strength. There are others which mock the fulness of our power and the tenacity of our patience. We resolve to do them, and we are beaten back, and taught a lesson of self-impotence which otherwise we never could have learned. Can you add one cubit unto your stature? You may wear high-heeled boots, you may order the tallest hats, but the height of your stature you are utterly unable to increase. God himself sovereignly draws certain boundary lines. In some instances God allows us to a large extent to draw our own boundaries; in others he presently gives the final and decisive word, "Hitherto—no further." It is important to know the difference between quantities which are variable and quantities which are fixed. This knowledge may save us a great deal of trouble, and prevent very much pain. Can your teeth bite the rock? However hungry you are, is there strength in your jaw to bite the granite? Can your feet stand upon the flowing river? Can you lay your finger upon the lowest of all the stars that shine in heaven? A thousand such questions show that we are hemmed in by the impassable; we walk upon the edge of a gulf; and our mightiest endeavours show us that after all we are only beating ourselves against the bars of a great cage! A painted cage, but a cage still—a cage lamp-lit, but a cage still.

This limitation of our power must have some meaning.

Jesus Christ makes use of it in illustrating not only the sovereignty, but the goodness of God. He teaches us to trust the Father who has determined the height of our stature. He shows that if we cannot do such apparently little things as he has specified in his sermon, it is absurd to suppose we can do things which are infinitely greater ; checks our anxiety by showing that our keenest solicitude about earthly concerns boots nothing when it gets beyond trust, and becomes practical atheism. This argument is as beautiful in its simplicity as it is universal in its application. Wherever there is a man, whatever his colour, language, age, he can understand this challenge : Can you add one cubit unto your stature ? Why are you not taller ? There seems to be room enough above you to admit of growth. Why don't you grow ? You would not shut out the light of the sun even if you were half an inch taller ! You would not imperil the stars if you did stand half a hair's breadth higher ! Why do you not add to your stature ? You can scheme, and arrange, and plot, and suggest. Sir ! why not add to your stature ? You cannot. Then consider : ask yourself a few plain, searching questions. See how God rules in all things—in your height, in the bounds of your habitation, in all the limits which he has set to your life. And let the height of thy stature, the tinted grass, the colour of thy hair, the flight of birds, the time of the rising of the sun and the setting of the same, teach thee the first principles of natural theology. Learn thou that thy little power, expressing itself in ten thousand impotent spasms, is not the measure of God's sovereignty !

The inquiry of the text serves to rebuke our anxiety and humble our impious ambition, by asking us questions

which conduct us still further into the glory and the mystery of God's kingdom.

Which of us by taking thought can find out God? "The world by wisdom knew not God." The world dreamed, guessed, groped,—and the result was, an acknowledgment of the unknown. The world in the fulness of its wisdom found its way to an unexplained Shadow, and there it stood, terrified by its own discovery, dumb through fear, skulking from a spectre which it never could brighten into a God. Which of you by taking thought can find out the eternal, the infinite, the divine? Our Father is made known to us by revelation—he is self-revealed, self-portrayed. Why? That no flesh should glory in his presence. "Where is the wise, where is the scribe, where is the disputer of this world?" So long as men imagine that they can find out God by intellectual research they will be self-confident, they will be alienated from one another, they will be fear-ridden and superstitious. Only as they accept God's revelation of himself as a free, gracious gift will they realise the common wants of human nature, and be moved to the utterance and enjoyment of a common worship.

Which of you by taking thought can direct his own life? This we have tried to do many a time, so we can speak with all the distinctness and emphasis of experience. "Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." You cannot see through a single hour. When you have laid your plan, something will occur which you could not foresee. The road looks very clear, but who can tell what may be down in the hedgeside? You say, "This same shall comfort us." And lo! it is cut down with a stroke. You make an engagement for seven years, and

the moment you have signed the bond you may be disabled by a mortal pain. You lay up for your children, and, behold, your store is blown away by an unexpected wind! Jesus Christ comes to us under these circumstances and says, "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" What is the value of your anxiety? What is the practical worth of all this consideration, all this fear, all this scheming and planning about eating and drinking and apparel? These inquiries seem to mock and torment us until, having riven open the wound, he pours in this oil: "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." There are some things which your heavenly Father takes into his own hands. There are some keys which he never takes off his own girdle and puts into the possession of cherub, seraph, or man. What then? Seeing that you are beaten at every point, and thrown back helplessly in many of your endeavours, "seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and as for these other things upon which you have been spending your most anxious fears, they shall be added unto you as if they were nothing—given as a merchantman might give the child of his customer some little thing when he has concluded great bargains.

Which of you by taking thought can discover a plan for redeeming and saving the soul? Here also we have had experience. Self-destroyed, we thought we might be self-saved. We have gone to many a river and bathed in its waters of promise. We have hewn out unto ourselves cisterns. We have followed the wise man from place to place, that we might listen to his theories and consider his suggestions. No heretic ever wrote a book which we did not instantly buy and eagerly devour. We

have endeavoured to colour our external life, to give that life brightness of hue, healthiness of complexion. We have been casuistical in our reasoning ; we have endeavoured to found a system of intuitive morals ; we have consulted the light within us, and developed our consciousness to the very utmost, and still the sting pierces us ! We have gathered feathers and made a pillow for our weary, aching heads ; and lo ! no sleep has come to us—no rest has eased our pain and recovered our power ! This is a subject upon which we have expended thought. The mightiest minds among men have exercised themselves upon this very point. The world has set itself to get rid of God and of his Christ. Still there is unrest in our souls ; there is bitterness in our chief joy. If you cannot add one cubit unto your stature, how can you save the world ? If you cannot give yourself an inch extra height, how can you save human souls ? Thus Christ rebukes us, challenges us, confounds us. Thus he gives us to feel that, after all, if there is not rest, peace, salvation in that blood-stained Cross of his, they are not elsewhere to be found ! If the Cross won't do, nothing else will do. So our minds are put back ; we are shown our littleness ; our impotence is forced upon us, that we may start from that point in all our reasonings and all our service.

This great fact of the divine limitation of human power is to rule us in the deepest of our studies and in the profoundest of our worship. If we lay hold of this truth, and have a clear, deep, tender conviction of it and of all the truths which it represents, three great effects ought to be produced upon our life.

First, it should foster the most loving and confident

trust in the goodness of God. There is a point where we cannot go one iota further, where we are compelled to one of two things,—reverent and intelligent trust, or the ostrich-blindness which seems to proceed upon the principle that to shut the eyes is to escape all observation and all control. The course of reasoning in our minds ought to be this : “I cannot add one cubit unto my stature ; God has determined my height.” If he has been mindful of such a little thing as that, will he be unmindful of great things? If I find his signature upon single leaves, upon atoms, upon dew-drops, shall I not find his signature on the great forest, on the face of the universe, on the great ocean of creation? Is God confined to things that are little and trivial? Of what consequence is a man’s height? Whether he be seven feet five or four is a matter of the smallest moment; yet if God has fixed that line, does his care of mankind terminate there? Is there nothing beyond? When he brings me to this point and says, “You cannot take one step further,” yet there is a great future to be traversed, he implies that, since my power is exhausted, his hand is at my service. The appeal, then, is this—a tender, gracious, redeeming appeal—recovering our souls from despair, and establishing our hearts in trust. As God is Sovereign over things of apparently little consequence, he is as much King and Lord over all things of intrinsic importance, of infinite value. What have we, after all, to do with to-morrow? Yet that to-morrow seems the worst devil that some of us have to fight. It comes upon us and tempts us into atheism ; it lures us away from simple childlike trust, and incites us to ambitious scheming and the self-trust which is the worst phase of practical atheism. Jesus Christ would stand between us and that fatal to-morrow, and tell us that it is in the hands of God, and that which he

does is best. If we think that we can do something towards securing to-morrow for ourselves, and provide against contingencies, Jesus Christ says that it is true up to a given point, but beyond that point it is the worst of lies! If we still think we have somewhat of undeveloped power, he says, "You have not." "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? Thou canst not make one hair white or black." And unless you begin your reasoning at that point, you will flounder in a thousand mistakes, and your worship will never reach the ear of God!

In the next place, this truth should moderate our tone respecting opinions which are not decisively settled by revelation. If a man can't increase his stature, how can he increase the volume of God's truth? If a man can't increase his stature, who gives him authority to speak where God has been silent? I believe in dogma, I believe confidently in positive truth, in clearly marked and defined lines. At the same time, I question every man's right or power to say positively that such and such a doctrine is true if he have not God's own word to confirm the testimony which he bears. This ought to make us very charitable towards one another. Alas! some men who could not, if it were to save their souls, add half an inch to their stature, stand up in the church and condemn thousands of their fellow men, when God has given them no authority so to do. There is enough revealed in the holy book for our guidance; there is a sufficiency of revelation for any want of our life; and as to interpretation, there we must have the widest liberty, the tenderest of charity, the utmost mutual concession. Whoso claims infallibility, beyond uttering the plain letter and word of God's truth, sets himself up to be God,

and commits the grossest blasphemy ! I shall try to learn this lesson, and if any man come to me with a suggestion bearing upon some hitherto concealed phase of truth, I must receive it for consideration,—I must abstain from anathema, from harsh answers, from objurgatory declarations ; for what know I but that out of a child's mouth he may have sent me some new message ? But if I be required under pain and penalty to subscribe it, believe it, and preach it, then I must have the most distinct declaration from the inspired volume itself that the proposition is true. For if a man cannot add one cubit unto his stature, we need not hesitate to say that it is beyond his power to write a supplement to God's book, and to say what God himself has left unsaid.

In the last place, this truth should encourage us to cultivate with fuller patience and intenser zeal the powers which we know to be capable of expansion. We see some things most sharply by contrast. Here we have a point which challenges contrast of the most practical and instructive kind. For example, you cannot add one cubit unto your stature, yet you can increase the volume and force of your mind. See the truthfulness of the doctrine we have laid down, that in some things God sharply gives the final line, in others he leaves great liberty, and calls men to growth that seems to have no end. See how apparently arbitrary is divine sovereignty in some of its workings. A man can't increase his height one inch, and yet I find nowhere a limit to intellectual supremacy and to the expansion of intellectual power. Your body has done growing, but your mind may just have begun to look at the alphabet of truth. When the animal has reached the utmost limit of its capability, the intellectual, the divine may go on increasing,

expanding, refining ; for God constantly says to the faithful servant, "Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things." Whatsoever a man's mind legitimately attains, God still says, "Come up higher."

Though you cannot add one cubit unto your stature, you may relieve the pain of a thousand hearts. See what a contrast is this ! What little creatures we are in some particulars ! How God crushes us, and stunts us, and says, "There, you cannot get an inch higher than that" ! Then he says to those creatures so stunted and imprisoned, "Now you may go out, round and round the world, carrying with you the morning of redemption, the day of mercy, the gifts of love." So little, and yet so great ! A worm, yet almost a God,—dying, yet living for ever ! Crushed before the moth, yet educated and sanctified until fit for the society of angels !

Though you cannot add one cubit unto your stature, you may cultivate an ever-deepening acquaintance with the will of God ; you may know God more perfectly, read his word with a clearer eye, receive the suggestions and instructions of his Holy Spirit more lovingly, more loyally and trustfully, so that you may be men in understanding. Here again we have the little and the great,—man the prisoner, and man the free citizen of the universe ; man limited, and man well-nigh as unlimited as God himself. So strange, so wondrous—may it be so instructive —are the contradictions of human life ! So I come with a rebuke to those who say that all their theology terminates upon the word "cannot." Understand there is a can as well as a cannot. Understand that though there are limitations, there are yet great liberties ; and

that whilst on the one hand we are taught how little and impotent we are, on the other we are encouraged to study, prayer, growth, and expansion, until we recover the lost lineaments of our glorious Creator. Wise is the man who knows what he can do and what he cannot. The old law cannot be broken—namely, “Thou shalt,” “thou shalt not”; thou canst, thou canst not. The old temptation still assails us—namely, to touch the forbidden tree. Yes, if men who have spent their strength on trying to do the impossible had expended it upon honest efforts to do the revealed will of God, society would be revolutionised in a day. But the old temptation appeals to us evermore. Some new charm is thrown over us from the forbidden tree; constantly some new offer lures us from the appointed path; we become faint by our imprisonment. Our ambition says, “Be bold, and take a brave man’s course.” We follow the tempter, and God’s spear smites us for the wicked trespass. Yet we cannot learn,—we will not learn. Where God has written upon the door “Private,” we go to that door and beat it, and importune God to open it. And where he has thrown open gates which disclose upon whole heavens of truth and beauty, we will not go in. We would rather increase our stature than save our souls!

What a poor account some of us will have to give at last! We shall sum up our life in this way: “We have been trying to do the impossible. We heard that we could not add one cubit unto our stature, and the thing seemed so unreasonable that we determined to try it. We heard that we could not overstep certain boundaries, and we have diligently endeavoured to cross them.” That is what some men are doing—hammering away at the impossible! This is a difficulty that tells in many ways. A man sets

his mind upon a certain course. If he can't go down there, he won't go anywhere, not seeing that though that course is shut up to him, a thousand other courses round about are inviting him by their charms and importuning him by their importance.

Let us go to them, then, knowing that we are limited in our little sphere ; that there are marked and positive limitations in some cases ; and that everywhere—excepting when we are growing up into the likeness of God—there is limitation. Let that rebuke human reason,—let that curb human selfishness,—let that stand by us when we read the holy word and try to solve its mysteries. And when we become weary of looking at our littleness, our experiments, and our impotence, and turn round in other directions, we find that we may take wings—strong, great, unwearying pinions—and fly away right up to the very heart and heaven of God ! Though we be little, we are great. Though we are shut up and confined and mocked in some directions, in other directions we are citizens of the universe, freemen of the whole creation. Blessed are they who know alike the limit and the liberty of human life !

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou knowest our frame, thou rememberest that it is but dust. We are a wind, which cometh for a little time and then passeth away. Thou hast put breath in our nostrils ; there is none that hath life abiding in himself. In thee we live and move and have our being. When our strength doth waste by the way, thou callest upon us to wait upon God, that our strength may be renewed. If so be we tarry at thine altar and wait with all childlike patience and trust at thy gate, even youths shall faint and be weary and young men shall utterly fall, but we shall renew our strength, we shall have resting upon us the very power of God. Thou knowest the anxiety of our life, the cares which beset us, all the occupations which engross our attention and exhaust our energy. Thou knowest how oftentimes we are afflicted by the disappointments of a mocking world ; how we are promised great things, and how the promises turn to nothingness ; how we lean upon Egypt as upon a staff, and how it doth break and pierce the hand that trusted it. We rejoice in thee, and above all things to be able to draw nigh unto the living God, to draw water out of the wells of salvation, to renew our strength in religious meditation and saintly worship ! Now that we have gathered for one purpose, do thou graciously meet us ; lead us into the green pastures, conduct us by the still waters. We bless thee for the Rock that is higher than we. We thank thee for the shadow in the time of burning and heat and dazzling light. We flee unto thee as a covert from the storm. Thou art our tower and strong defence, our shield and buckler, our song, our strength, our infinite sufficiency ! We have done the things we ought not to have done. God be merciful unto us sinners ! Visit us not in wrath. Speak to us with all the condescension of unutterable mercy, and gather us again. We have lost ourselves : do thou light the house, sweep, and seek diligently until thou dost find us ! May our whole nature be brought back again to the fountain of life ! May our peace be complete in the rest of God ! Forgive our sins, because of the work of Jesus Christ. "Through this man has been preached unto

us the forgiveness of sins." May we, having heard the joyful sound with the outward ear, hear it with the ear of the soul, and be glad under the spell of its music! May we know the meaning of the mystery of God's pardon extended to men who have forfeited their life and their destiny by reason of committing sin! Now be with us; give us some sense of the rest that abideth for weary pilgrims in Christ in the land that is afar off. Give us some hint of the unutterable peace which we shall enjoy when we have escaped this sphere of discipline and temptation, and are set in our Father's house on high! To God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be the kingdom and the power and glory, world without end! Amen.

IX.

HIGH RESOLVES.

"Let us therefore."—HEB. iv. 1.

SO frequent is the use of the word "therefore" in this chapter, and in other chapters of this epistle, that I sometimes can hardly resist the impression that the epistle is the work of that greatest theological logician the Apostle Paul. At other times the epistle is so eloquent and so rhetorical that I have no difficulty in accepting the suggestion that it is the production of Apollos, "an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures." We are accustomed to hear that certain authors work in what is called collaboration; it would be easy for me to believe that both Paul and Apollos wrote this severely argued and thrillingly eloquent epistle. We are face to face with certain high resolves to which the writer would strenuously bind us. Let us take them in order:

I. "Let us therefore fear" Let us be anxious, lest we are missing something that God intended us to receive and enjoy. The word "therefore" refers to an evil example which had occurred centuries before. The writer

will not allow history to be wasted upon us. In effect he says, " See what befell your fathers in the wilderness. Observe what unbelief did for them." Unbelief blinds the eyes and dulls the imagination, and stupefies the conscience. You need not enter into any experiment regarding the nature and devastating effects of unbelief, as all these things have been made only too clear by the examples of ancient history. By exciting fear, the Apostle would excite conscience and the spirit of careful inquiry. Unbelief is not always and necessarily defiance or open hostility to divine revelation or requirement. There is a condition of mind which is neither hostile nor loyal. That condition may be described as largely neutral, mainly indifferent, a simple negation of attitude as to conviction and duty. The writer warns the Hebrews that unbelief deprives the soul of its richest possessions and enjoyments. The unbelievers might have entered into rest ; but because of their unbelief their carcasses fell in the wilderness, and their aspirations, if they ever had any, were stifled and disappointed. It is customary to suppose that unbelief works its great havoc almost wholly in the religious zones of life. Unbelief has become a kind of theological term. It is, however, a larger word. For my own part, I have no hesitation in pointing out that unbelief would dissolve society itself. Not only is the Church kept together by faith, but society is also welded and consolidated by the same power. Unbelief has no rest. Unbelief shuts out all its victims even when they are only but a step from the infinite security and peace of heaven. We do not want a negative faith, if such a conjunction of terms be admissible. We want a positive, definite, all-conquering faith. About this faith we are to be anxious, always remembering that it is just possible that for want of keener vigilance we may miss great opportunities of entering into

the wealth and joy and heaven of rest. "Let us therefore fear, lest —" There is always something to be reverently anxious about. We are not to be anxious in the sense that turns anxiety itself into unbelief; we are to be anxious in an intelligent, devout, expectant sense. We are to guard against some possible leakage in the character. We are to be on the watch lest some little thing should spoil or limit our inheritance in Christ Jesus. The reason given for this exhortation is historical and experimental. If other men have failed through unbelief, why may not we also fail? Failure of belief is failure of soul. "Lord, increase our faith."

2. "Let us therefore labour —" This man will not allow us to escape the privilege and the joy, as well as the drudgery and pain, of discipline. Only the labourer really knows the meaning of rest. Labour is an aspect of belief as certainly as it is an aspect of prayer. We are to labour with an object, and that object itself is exactly the opposite of labour. We have to labour that we may enter into rest. Strive to enter in at the strait gate. What I say unto one I say unto all, "Watch." Be ye therefore ready, for ye know not at what hour the gate may be open and the King may summon you to his presence-chamber. Hopeless labour is the worst of slavery. Give a man to feel that at the end of his labour he will reap a worthy harvest, then the storm and the darkness of seedtime will become part of his blessing. Tell a man that, labour how he may, he will never reap the harvest of his own industry, and at once you quell the courage which would have enabled him to expend his best powers upon his immediate work. It is part of the very gospel of the heart of Christ that the worker or labourer is to enter into the joy of his Lord. We are

saved by hope. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. He that goeth forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall return with a song in his mouth, bringing his sheaves with him, and waving them in grateful ecstasy before the Lord of the harvest. Christians may be taunted that they are always fasting, or watching, or praying; always cutting off the right hand or plucking out the right eye; always carrying the melancholy and overpowering Cross;—in a sense that is quite true, but Jesus always accompanies the discipline with an infinitely gracious promise. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “Where I am there ye shall be also.” The Apostle Paul writes and speaks in the same high strain. Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. If we suffer we shall also reign with him. If we know the fellowship of his sufferings, we shall also realise the power of his resurrection. Let us therefore labour every hour of the day. Let us keep our armour bright. We suffer not only for Christ, but with Christ, and suffering in such high society we forget our suffering in our already dawning day of rest. The Apostle having given us the exhortation “Let us fear” and the exhortation “Let us labour,” gives us another.

3. “Let us hold fast our profession.” This is also a logical term. The word “therefore” does not literally occur, but it is here in all the effect of its logical pressure. “Seeing, then, that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.” This is a formal argument. Because we have certain possessions we are to strive after still further advantages. Having the living Saviour, we are not to be content until we have realised all the

blessings of his salvation. In this same epistle the Apostle describes Jesus Christ as the Apostle and High Priest of our profession. This is not the only instance in which the Apostle employs the same hortatory form, for in the tenth chapter he says: "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering." We are to be upon our guard lest we hold our faith lightly. With what a nerveless grasp many men hold up the banner of the Cross! There are nerveless Christians, nerveless preachers, nerveless testimonies. The action to which the Apostle calls us is strenuous. We have to lay hold of the kingdom of God with both hands. We are to see to it that not for one moment does any finger lose its grasp upon the holy treasure. We know what it is to work reluctantly. In a perfunctory way we render the service, we count the number, we watch the door, we obey the voice. All this may be done without being done. There is nothing done that is not done by the heart. There are no hireling Christians, or in the degree in which they are hirelings they are not the true servants of God. Let our Christian testimony go for something. Let it be so definite that we can never be mistaken as belonging to the other side. Christianity does not live by compromise, concession, or calculated arrangement with the enemy. Christianity is everything or it is nothing. If we do not hold fast our profession, the enemy will take it from us—not necessarily by violence, so as to make a public show of our depletion, but little by little, almost imperceptibly, and we shall never know what ruin it has wrought until in some hour of special trial we discover, to our infinite horror, that our manhood has been sapped and overthrown.

Are not these disciplinary and military injunctions? Are they arbitrary, severe, and after the manner of a

cast-iron law? To "fear," to "labour," to "hold fast," is not all this a severe strain upon the nervous and spiritual system? By watching we may lose our sight; by holding fast we may benumb our muscles. By fear we may lose our joy and song in the Christian faith. It might be so if the exhortations ended here; but last of all the Apostle comes in with the very fountain of our strength and capability. We are not left to ourselves. We are not spending a strength at once limited and begrimed. Read on:

4. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." This is the highest "therefore" of all! A wonderful conjunction of words is this "throne" and "grace." If it be a throne it must be awesome in its righteousness and moral sovereignty, so that no delinquent may approach its implacable sternness. We are told that it is the contrary, for not only is it a throne, it is a throne of grace, of favour, of privilege, of abundant and ever-enduring mercy. Let us come boldly. If we have been fearing, labouring, holding fast, we shall be prepared to come without timidity to the well-head and fountain of energy and divine hospitality. The object of prayer is to "find grace"—in other words, to find pardon, comfort, assurance that the divine power is at our disposal. Every time is a time of need. Life is one cry of necessity or of pain. Whilst every time is a time of need, there are undoubtedly times of special necessity, times of agony, supreme hours in which we seem to need all the fulness of the Godhead.

How this Apostle understands the Christian life! What a grip he has upon all the verities of the glorious gospel! We are not now in the hands of a man who would lull

us into false peace, or permit us to indulge the fallacy that we have only to be sentimental and self-considering and religiously contemplative, in order to be the followers of Christ and the exemplars of divine grace. We are to be soldiers, covered with the whole panoply of God, and sentinels standing on the walls watching and listening lest the enemy should be approaching the citadel. How infinite the privileges of the Christian! He may go into the very presence-chamber of the King. He may live and move and have his being in God. "Through Jesus Christ we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." There is a modest boldness—boldness without blatancy or self-confidence, or consciousness of personal worthiness—to enter into sacred places. "In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him." The boldness and the confidence are not self-begotten—they are by faith in him. Faith means boldness. Faith in Christ is the spring of true confidence. Whilst, therefore, we think of the "fear," the "labour," the "hold fast," we have supremely to think of the coming to "the throne of grace." That throne is not an occasional vision, to be seen only now and then when the incalculable clouds open to give us one glimpse of that glory that is beyond. The throne of grace is established for ever, and is accessible by day and by night—when the clouds thunder, and when the breezes of summer breathe amongst the flowers of the garden. Pray without ceasing. Never go where you cannot pray. As for the "time of need," the throne of grace was set up to meet that time, and in all the history of the Christian heart it has never been known to fail.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we thank thee that through Jesus Christ our Lord we can talk to thee. This is wondrous in our eyes ; this is the gift and the blessing of God, that a man should talk with him, as it were, face to face. We will talk of thy goodness, for it has surrounded us, sustained us ; it has been our light by day and our rest by night ; we have found it in the morning, and in the time of sleep it has sealed us as with benediction. All thy way towards us has been a way of goodness. We have not known this at all times ; we have said, "This is a sore evil," not knowing that God sent us into Egypt, into darkness, into great sorrow, that we might be his ministers and angels, and that we might reveal the goodness of Heaven. We cannot tell what thou art doing with us ; we have plans of our own which we think better than thine ; we could hasten things, we could do them to-day : so we think, and so we tell lies to ourselves, and so we bring upon ourselves sharp torments and great burdens. We wonder why thou dost delay : why not grow the harvest in the night-time, and cut it down in the morning, and enjoy the new bread at sunset ? Yet the Lord seemeth to our poor ignorance and impatience to be slack concerning his promises : teach us that thou art not slow, but long-suffering ; show us that we know nothing, that we are mistaking everything, and that if left to ourselves our lives would come to swift ruin ; show us that thou art the Lord, thy throne is in the midst of things, and thy law will govern and determine all processes. In this faith may we live. We are not under the law, but under the Lawgiver ; we look not to the law, but to God, even the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ; and the Cross shall be the eternal pledge that law is but another aspect of love. We will hasten to the Cross, for there thy goodness is as noonday, there the love of God is manifest as nowhere else : this is the very glory of heaven, this is the very summer of time, this is the very rest and music of eternity. May we never wander from the Cross ; we are tempted to go every day,— this man hath a poem, and yonder man a fine sentence, and each

comes to us to ask us to follow him, and if we follow it is into emptiness and distress. Help us to abide on Calvary; help us to tarry at the Cross, for there only can broken hearts find healing and shattered lives find restoration. Undertake for us in all the way of our life: to-morrow is to be a day of special difficulty, but thou canst prepare us for it, and in the morning we can find the difficulty rolled away. All the angels are thine; thou dost command them to wait upon us as bodyguards: send thine angel and deliver us, and give us the freedom for which we yearn. Where there is special distress let there be special comfort, where there is a secret aching of heart may there be a secret ministration of balm from heaven, where our thoughts are far away, following the lives without which we should have no life, help us to believe that the little earth is all thine, and that in God all time is one, and that even now we can meet with our absent ones at the Cross and at the mercy throne. Where there is sorrow upon sorrow, that great devouring sorrow that spares neither old nor young, the little child swallowed up by its tremendous energy, the Lord himself be present, lest our lives lose all hope and we go down into the night of despair. Where any man has written a good vow, help him to remember every letter of it, and to carry his signature before his eyes night and day, that he may know his bond and keep it like a man of honour. Where any one has purposed evil, may he forget his purpose; turn his design upside down; when he is going to be unjust, cruel, precipitant, when he would act impetuously and foolishly, the Lord stand between him and his purpose, and turn his heart to consideration and to prayer. May all grey heads be crowned as it were with the glory of heaven; may all young lives be as spring flowers in God's garden; may all our dying ones leave us commands which it will be a pleasure to obey; and may those to whom we look always for strength, security, rest, and guidance be continued a long time to us, for when they die there is no longer any life for us. We thank thee for all thy care and love and patience, and especially desire from thee the great gift of the Holy Ghost, that he may abide with us, rule in us, enlighten us, direct us, and comfort us, and make us meet for the inheritance with the saints in glory. Amen.

X.

THE POOR AND THEIR POVERTY.

"They cannot recompense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."—LUKE xiv. 14.

A N advertisement on the city walls struck me as singularly suggestive; it contained the words, "God and the poor." Such a conjunction of words is most remarkable: the highest and the lowest, he who owns all things, and they who own nothing. It is a conjunction of extremes; and though it looked very extraordinary on a placard, yet if you examine the Old and New Testaments, the idea will be discovered almost more frequently than any other. They are not general and vague references which God and Christ make to the poor. So rich, so consolatory, so full of promise are those references, that one could almost covet the honour of being enclosed in the humble circle to which they are directed.

Our present business is to examine the sacred record for the purpose of ascertaining the relation of God to the poor, and the relation of the poor to the Church.

I. The relation of God to the poor.

The poor are often talked of as a nuisance; they are avoided as plagues; they are too frequently legislated for with a haughty air. The heart is not allowed to yearn lovingly towards them, and to lavish its tenderest sympathies upon their woes and wants. Too often the time spent in their society is begrudged, and we hasten from the cold pavement of the cellar to the velveted floor of the mansion. As many of us as are guilty in this matter will be rebuked by examining God's declarations of his own feelings towards the poor and needy.

There is a strange mingling of terror and tenderness in God's language in relation to the poor ; terror towards their oppressors, tenderness towards themselves. Take the former : "Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker." "Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees,

to turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless." Mark the words, "Woe unto them !" What does God mean by "Woe"? Who can tell how intense the anger that burns against the oppressor of the widow and orphan ! In God's "woe" there is room enough for all the fire of hell!

Hear again : "Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong ; that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work. Shall I not visit for these things ? saith the Lord." Man builds himself a great "house," and furnishes sumptuous "chambers," and in doing so grinds the face of the poor. Will any blessing rest on such a "house," or any light from God's countenance stream into such "chambers"? We wait for the awful answer, and here it is : "Forasmuch as their treading is upon the poor, and they take from him burdens of wheat ; they have built houses of hewn stone, but they shall not dwell in them ; they have planted pleasant vineyards, but they shall not drink wine of them. For I know their manifold transgressions and their mighty sins : they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right."

Is it not true, then, that "the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor?" Imagine

the awful spectacle delineated in this threatening : the man opens quarries, digs out the rock, polishes it into beauty, carves it into cunning devices, puts it together into a “house of hewn stone,” and when he is about to enter it, and feast his soul with selfish enjoyment, he falls a corpse on his own threshold, and another gathers his riches ! “They have built houses of hewn stone, but they shall not dwell in them.”

Or again : They seek out the best vines ; they place them under the most skilful culture ; they raise them to the highest pitch of perfection ; they press out the rich juice ;—and the wine turns to wormwood on their lips ! “They have planted pleasant vineyards, but they shall not drink wine of them.”

God knows all the afflictions of the poor, and in bitter words he complains of their tormentors. Hear them : “There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men. They drive away the ass of the fatherless ; they turn the needy out of the way. They cause the naked to lodge without clothing, that they have no covering in the cold. They are wet with the showers of the mountains, and embrace the rock for want of a shelter.”

All is known in heaven ! Every black line is entered on its books ! Every secret misdeed is chronicled in the King’s court ! In the very time of our fancied security the heavens will rain fire on our dwelling-places ; and in the midst of our sleeping the destroying angel will seal our eyelids with death ! “Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within

thy gates : at his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it ; lest he cry against thee unto the Lord, and it be sin unto thee." Oh, that cry ! It is the shriek of hunger —it is the yell of trampled justice —it is the groan of unpitied suffering ! " The hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth : and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth."

Such are some of the sentences of fire in which God speaks of the oppressor of the poor. We now turn from terror to tenderness. We shall hear how God speaks of the poor themselves. The lips that spoke in fire now quiver with messages set to music: " Is not this the fast that I have chosen ? to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house ? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him ; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh ? "

There is an extract which I must give from God's ancient legislation, and as I read you will be able to say whether ever Act of Parliament was so beautiful : " When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it : it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow : that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again : it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward : it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow."

And why this beneficial arrangement? You will find that this was a memorial act; it was to keep the doers in grateful remembrance of God's mighty interposition on their behalf: "Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing." When men draw their gratitude from their memory, their hand will be opened in perpetual benefaction!

Will you hear another extract from God's legislation in Judaism? These prose lyrics should not remain silent in the Christian Church. Let them be heard in all their sweetness of melody: "If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto." These words fall like the dew of morning. They speak of a heart which overflows with love, and are laden with promises which should excite the loftiest ambition in every heart. "He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack; but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse."

II. The relation of the poor to the Church.

"The poor ye have always with you." For what purpose? As a perpetual appeal to our deepest sympathy; as an abiding memorial of our Saviour's own condition while upon earth; as an incitement to our most practical gratitude. The poor are given into the charge

of the Church, with the most loving commendation of Christ, their companion and Saviour. He was their companion : "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich."

The relation of the poor to the Church may be looked at from a material and from a spiritual point of view.

i. The poor require physical blessing. Christ helped man's bodily nature. He healed disease, he appeased hunger, he removed burdens. In no one instance was Christ indifferent to the claims of the body. The Church devotes itself more to the spirit than to the flesh. This is right: yet we are in danger of forgetting that Christianity has a mission to the body as well as to the soul. The body is the entrance to the soul. Before preaching to a hungry man, give him bread; the sermon will be all the better for the food. And is there no reward? Will the Lord who remembers the poor forget the poor's benefactor? Truly not! "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble." There is a case on record of a most illustrious philanthropist whose experience should never be forgotten. He gathered the orphans to his warm heart, and upon the lonely and sorrowful he shed the light of hope. He shall tell his own thrilling story: "Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him; the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I

searched out. Let these last words ring in your ears : "the cause which I knew not I searched out." The man was in earnest: he went about doing good ; he asked questions, collected information, and made himself master of details. His was not a cursory and superficial examination, but comprehensive, minute, precise ! Let no Christian plead ignorance in palliation of illiberality : " If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain ; if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not ; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it ? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it ? and shall not he render to every man according to his works ?" Search out ? He who searches finds.

2. The poor require physical blessing ; but still more do they require spiritual blessing. The harvest is great, the labourers are few. " Pure religion before God and the Father is this: To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." Every sanctuary is located in a particular neighbourhood for the special benefit of that neighbourhood. A church is not built in the first instance for the benefit of a township five miles off ; it is put down for the spiritual advantage of the immediately surrounding population ; and how brilliant soever may be our reputation for evangelising the Chinese or the Hottentots, we shall be " worse than infidels " if we provide not for our own neighbours. Imagine a man carrying water to put out a stranger's fire a mile off, when his own father's house next door to his own is in flames ! Or fancy a man sending bread to Africa, when his own children are dying of hunger ! My clients to-day are men who are clustering around our own building,—women who are perishing within the echoes of our own psalmody. They

are not black, or red, or yellow ; they speak not a foreign language ; they are our neighbours, and many of them know not the Son of God. "As we have, therefore, opportunity, let us do good unto all men." We want labourers—persons who can distribute tracts silently, and persons who can speak a word in season ; we want rich men who can go in carriages, and poor men who can only walk ; we want ladies who are muffled and furred with all the armour of a luxurious civilisation, and poor women whose hearts are warm with a glowing love to the Saviour ; we want persons who can teach ragged children, and persons who can address ragged men. Who will come ? Don't oppress those who are working too much already. There is a vast amount of non-productive energy in the Church. There are men and women voluntarily dumb,—they must speak ; there are Christians who have an enormous talent for sleeping,—they must be awakened ; there are disciples who imagine that their Christian duties are discharged when they have criticised other people,—they must be persuaded or provoked into activity. As with the body, so with the soul—we cannot do our duty with mere empty words. "If a brother or a sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, and be ye warmed and filled ; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit ?" So with the soul. It is not enough to erect your buildings ; you must go out, and with all the gentle violence of love "compel men to come in." You can bring in the millennium when you please ; God is waiting ; the Redeemer is at hand : "Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord, if I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, until there shall not be room enough to contain it." That is the challenge ;

who will accept it? God says he waits to be gracious; then let us wait patiently upon God! The rain will come if we pray for it. The battle will be given to Israel if we hold up the hands of his servant.

Do you inquire as to recompense? It is infinite! "They cannot recompense thee, but thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." And yet they can recompense thee! Every look of the gleaming eye is a recompense! Every tone of thankfulness is a repayment. Then let us "be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love"; let us hear the needy and save them. God is not unrighteous to forget our work of faith. If we do good unto one of the least of his brethren, Christ will receive the good as though offered to himself. And be it known unto those who refuse, that they too shall be recompensed. Terrible is the recompense of the wicked! "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard."

Much is being said about charity. They have carved her image in marble; they have enclosed her in gorgeously coloured glass; they have placed on her lofty brow the wreath of immortal amaranth; poesy has turned her name into rhythm, and music has chanted her praise. All this is well; all this is beautiful. It is all next to the best thing; but still, the best thing is to incorporate charity in the daily life, to breathe it as our native air, and to express it in all the actions of our hand. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." You will then be one with God!

"Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?" Then do not contemn the poor. "The liberal soul shall be made fat." "He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity."

Ye who are poor, remember your God, think of your Saviour, and evermore be poor in spirit. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Hope on! One day you will be rich enough! Through Jesus Christ your only Saviour you will have all heaven for your home, and joy unspeakable for your portion.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thy word is full of tenderness : God is love. May we always see the tears in the gospel, as well as hearken to its royal commandments ; may we be melted by the pathos, as well as inspired by the majesty of thy truth. What is thy truth, but thy Cross, O Son of God ?—shameful, glorious Cross. God forbid that we should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. All truth is there, and all beauty, and all music, and all progress—the beginning, continuance, and end of the endless heaven. Christ is all, and in all ; he begins, he ends, he ends to begin again, he filleth all in all ; heaven and the heaven of heavens overflow with his presence. How kind thou art eternally, O Son of God ! Thou dost always weep over the city that rejects thee ; thou dost promise heaven to the hearts that receive thee : truly thou art the Saviour of the world. We love thee more and more ; thou art a daily miracle to us ; we find thee in unexpected places,—walking on troubled waters, shining above all other stars in the night time, cooling the fevered brow, talking to the lonely woman, taking up little children and blessing them ; and going round the whole circuit of life like a spiritual sun. We have come to thy house to commune with thee, to whisper some things, to hint without words at others, and to cry mightily and loudly to thee for help in every time of need. Bless thy ministering servants before thee, one in the service of the King, one in the possession of a divine unction. Bless thy servants who labour in the market-place, and to whom is given the daily care, often the daily disappointment and bitterness, of life. Be with those who make our homes—the wives, the mothers, the servants, the children, all the domestic mystery, all the domestic tenderness. Send a plentiful rain upon thine inheritance, O thou Lord of the fertilising clouds ! Amen.

XI.

“ AGAIN.”

THE text is one word—a word of but two syllables—
one of the syllables only a letter. It is the word
“again.” In the selection of this text you will find that
the subject is not discoloured by one tinge of mere
oddness ; it is, when taken in its various relations and
settings, a Bible in itself. Who has not some darling
words that he could not and would not part with—words
which perhaps nobody but himself fully understands or
appreciates in their particular relation ? Have you con-
sidered what a wonderful position this word “again”
occupies in the inspired record ? Have you put it down
and surrounded it by kindred words in various and always
subtle-related connections ? It would be a poor Bible
without this word “again.” In it there is power, in it
there is tenderness, in it there is promise ; it is the dawn
that foretells and foreassures the noon. See if this be
not so.

When Jesus Christ underwent his first crucifixion, he
was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for
our iniquities. When he was in the agony of his first
crucifixion in the face-to-face encounter with the devil,
he had to answer the devil’s sophistry in the citation of
scriptural precedent and exhortation ; and thus he
answered the enemy : “It is written again” (Matt. iv. 7).
That saved him. The Bible is a whole, a unity ; it is
not a book of texts. Too often have preachers degraded
the Bible into a book of mottoes. No text is true unless
it be set in its proper relation to all other texts. Sects
build themselves upon disjoined passages, phrases, or
sentences. Many men are the victims of expressions ;

they cannot get rid of them, they cannot take in any other words kindred and illuminating and enlarging. Consequently they are mere literalists or textualists ; they are not biblists—men who understand all the Bible, if not in its meaning of words or its mystery of prophecy, yet in its spirit of light and tenderness and sympathy. Every little text is to be read in the light of the whole Bible. The dewdrop cannot be seen by the aid of a candle, it can only be rightly seen in the light of the sun ; it would seem to take all the sun to make that dewdrop what God meant it to be to the vision of human imagination. Jesus Christ might have listened to a single text, and have fallen, saying (I am speaking now with the reverence due to his mere humanity)—saying, “This is from the word of God. Evidently this is a direct citation from Holy Writ. This puts a new light upon the whole occasion. May there not be something in this suggestion after all, although it be the devil that makes it? May he have hit upon divine language and exhortation?” On the contrary, he said, “Yes, it is written, but it is written ‘again.’” Scripture balances Scripture ; the Bible is its own commentator. Woe betide our piety ! it will be but superstition or cant if it be not based upon the whole Biblical line. When we detach a text from its setting we deprive it of atmosphere, and atmosphere is the soul of art and poetry and highest significance of things. The alphabet has no atmosphere, and it has no literature : it is when it is related and set in proper light and colour that the one letter plays into the other, and out of the combination there comes revelation, wisdom, the very incarnation of God. We have taken the Bible in its unity. Pitiful is it to see some poor human fool take off a sentence and discourse upon its fluent pithlessness. If it be half a sentence, or even a word or a syllable,

taken in its relation to the whole Biblical line, then it may become luminous and suggestive and fruitful of richest good. Ministers, if I have entitled myself by service to speak to the youngest of you, I would say, know the Bible ; be filled with the Bible ; let the word of God dwell in you richly. Who has not heard sermons in which there was not a single verse of Scripture?—poor sermons, too clever to be wise, too fluent to be heart-breaking. The heart never broke under gabbling fluency ; it broke under sobs and tears and eloquent hesitation.

When the Lord went through the agony of his great prayer, he prayed God to glorify his own name, the Father's name ; and there came a voice to him saying, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again" (John xii. 28). God's revelation never ceases ; there is always an "again" after your richest blessing. Day by day we say, as we sit at his hospitable table, "Thou hast kept the good wine until now." He answers, "I have better. You have not yet seen the inner and sunnier vineyards ; you really know nothing of the juice of the vine as you will know it by-and-by." When does God come to us once for all? Did the Lord make the little world which we call the earth, and then say : "Now, having made you, you must take care of yourself"? Where did he say so? Produce the evidence. Always doth he say, "I made thee, and I will not forsake the work of mine own hands. If I considered it worth my while to make thee, I also consider it worth my while to nurse thee ; and if the wolf would have thee, he must first have me." We are hidden and secured in the almightyess of God. This "again" points to expanding revelations, confirmatory testimonies, repeated and reproduced evidence of the existence, providence, sovereignty, and fatherhood of God. When the

disciples saw some wondrous works which astonished their childish immaturity, Jesus said, "Greater works than these shall ye see": always he spoke along the line of this spiritual largeness and fulness. Christ's are unsearchable riches. The sermon is never done: I mean the great sermon, not the finished, mechanised, polished production of ignorant cleverness,—that was done before it was begun; I mean the great speech, with blood in its veins, with God in its pulsing heart, with tears of sympathy in its eager, passionate eyes. The world will always want such speech. It suits the perverted fancy of men who cannot talk to despise talk. That is not altogether wanting in human nature. There was a fox who caught that fever, and he said, concerning the inaccessible grapes, "Sour!" My ministerial friends, the world will always want heart-speech, speech with tears. Having observed many speakers and many preachers, and studied their ways and words with a view to learning useful lessons, I bear testimony that I have found more cleverness than pathos. Want of pathos is the ruin of any sermon. If your sermon have not tears in it, it cannot be glorified again and again, as it comes upon the memory of grief and upon the attitude of helplessness. Listen to the high discourse: how argumentative! how wondrously put together, compacted in every joint! how highly and obviously intellectual! But, O man! sweating thy poor brain for nothing, where is thy heart? where are thy tears? Men can understand tears, the real heart-tears, tears that well up out of the life when they cannot follow a luminous and elaborate argument. If, therefore, we would have God's word and God's name glorified again and again and again through all the wasting years of time, it must be by sending the messages of heaven through the pathos of a common human experience. What hope there is for the world in this assurance, "I

will glorify it again”! God never gives away all his light. Has the sun given away all his glory? Let us say that he began to shine only some six thousand years ago, or sixty thousand uncounted ages since, he is as bright now as ever. Summer never says, “My old solar creator has been shorn of his beams, and he cannot make now a summer worth looking at.” He is as mighty as ever, as rich in light; and looking upon the earth in its time of rest, he says, “I have glorified thee, and I will glorify thee again. Sleep awhile; I will watch over thee, and in due time thou shalt be arrayed like a bride attired for her husband.” Rely upon these promises; fall back on them. If you are forced to any violence, accept the policy of compelling God by tender prayer to redeem his own word.

In another crucifixion, the crucifixion in Gethsemane, Jesus Christ prayed, and he was not satisfied with the prayer. Herein he has made our experience like his own; when we have heard the prayer and seen the sweat-blood, we still feel a heartache, as if the prayer had not got quite into heaven. We made it, the words were well considered, they did not overstrain the thought; still we did not go with our own prayers. So we read in Mark and in Matthew, “He prayed again.” What! had Jesus occasion to amend or enlarge his prayers? See him, with bent form, with eloquent silence, going back into the inner place that he might try to pray again. Blessed be God, he allows us to amend our prayers; he does not crush us because we have not completed the circuit of desire as he meant it to be expressed. Jesus prayed again a second time, and said—. What it cost him! It cost him the cross—not the Roman gallows, but the cross of the soul. He said, “Not my will,”—and he stopped there,—“but thine be done.” Then, stronger than a giant, he came

back, and there was no more Cross for him ; there was the wood, there was the iron, there was the vulgar executioner, but the bitterness of death had passed in Gethsemane. Amend your prayers. “ Ye have not, because ye ask not, or because ye ask amiss.” You have broken off your prayers, and they stand in the garden of your memory like broken columns ; but God will not be harsh with us, he will allow us a week, a month, a year, and if at the end of the allotted time we go and say, “ Father, we can say it all now, ‘ Nevertheless, not our will, but thine be done,’ ” it is the “ again ” prayer, and not the incomplete petition, which he will answer.

Are all the uses of this word “ again ” on the divine side? Are there not some suggestive uses of it on the human side? There are. “ If a man die, shall he live again ? ” (Job xiv. 14). We cannot, you see, do without that word. We are not bounded by to-day ; it is what will happen to-morrow—the time of dream and of hope—that really can answer the uppermost and grandest desires of the soul. “ If a man die, shall he live again ? ” No. Why not? Because he never has lived yet. Live again, live as he did live, live in a little cage, live in an Aceldama, a place soaked with blood, live again in tears and heart-ache and sorrow and night? He shall live, but not “ again ” in any sense of limitation and facsimile and reproduction,—“ again ” in the same sense in which the bush in winter lives in summer, breaks into the fire of colour, when it offers as from a censer the incense of fragrance. We do not know what life is ; we have had periods of rapture, and have multiplied them in imagination, and have called the multiplication immortality. It is the best we can do, and God hath not despised the effort.

Did Jesus ever use the word “ again ” in relation to

human affairs? He used it, as we have seen, repeatedly in relation to himself; he also used it in relation to human history. Said he, “Ye must be born again,” not only in the sense of succession as in relation to one, but “again” in the sense of evolution, development, progress, higher and higher manhood; “again” in the sense that shakes off the cage and flies into the open firmament, itself a cage, but so much larger that it looks like liberty.

Is there no comfort in these words, these holy repetitions of “again”? There was once a feast, the best feast that ever was held in the house. The father hardly knew whether he was in the body or out of the body; everybody was quite in the agony of a great ecstasy; delight was pictured on every face inside the house; and when the old man was asked why this glee, why this mirth, why this dance, said he, “My son, who was dead, and is alive again.” Doth not Nature herself teach you when to dance, and when to sing, and when to weep, and when to be crumpled up like a withered thing that has lost its hold upon the juices of the universe? We have been dead—are we alive again? “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” Is your boy dead? He may live again, and may come to your house to-night. Let him find the door open, and to-night shall be such a night of festival and rapture in your house as the house has never seen before; and the house will never look so lovely—the poor old furniture will seem to have been burnished up by some unseen but deft hand, and everything in the old house will look familiar and kind and congratulatory. Oh, this again, again, again, comforts us, fills us with hope! ’Tis not all done once for ever. God hath his repetitions—let him work his miracles as he will.

In the Old Testament we find the word more than in Job xiv. 14, which we have just quoted. "The Lord shall choose Jerusalem again" (Zech. ii. 12). How often he has cast people off and himself half repented before they had time to shed a tear, and he has gone to them and said, "If ye will come again, the past, so black, so bitter, shall be all forgotten"! Jerusalem has sat down and said, "The Lord hath forgotten to be gracious, he hath blinded all the lights that made my day and my summer, and now I have nothing but bitterness of heart," and, lo! along the cloud rich with rainbows there came a voice saying, "The Lord shall choose Jerusalem again." And did Jesus not say that same word when he was leaving us? He said, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again"; and when he thought that word had not got sufficiently well down into our mind and heart he said, "Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you" (John xiv. 28). Lord Jesus, come quickly! and come in any way—personally, physically, visibly, or by some great accession of holy impulse, some great flood of heavenly love in the heart, some new view of thy heaven of revelation; as thou wilt, not as we will: but come quickly! Amen, amen!

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, and when thou hearest, Lord, forgive. Thou didst require that the altar should have its own atonement; behold, our prayers require to be cleansed; our piety is impious, our devotion is profane. O thou who didst wash the altar with blood, cleanse our heart by the blood of Christ! The blood of Jesus Christ thy Son cleanseth from all sin. There is a fountain opened in the house of David for sin and for uncleanness. It is not in our power to cleanse our hearts or even our hands; all cleansing must come from thee; therefore say we all, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and create within me a new spirit." May we know what is meant by the washing of regeneration; may we know what it is to be sanctified by thy truth. Thy word is truth; may it be a cleansing word, a word of innermost and completest purification, so that there shall not be left upon us spot or wrinkle or any such thing. Perfect us in the beauty of holiness. Thou hast undertaken our redemption and our sanctification, and thou shalt not fail of victory, because the word is thine own; the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it: this is the sweet and gracious purpose of heaven, this is the meaning of the Cross. Come, Holy Spirit, Spirit of Pentecost, with cleansing wind and cleansing fire, and give us to feel that thou hast a purpose to work out in our redemption and sanctification. We bless thee if we have any desire towards holiness. This is the miracle of God. We hear the great appeal, "Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect"; and again, "Be ye holy as your Father in heaven is holy." The voice is our Saviour's; he will not command us and then forsake us. Help us, Spirit divine; help us, thou Spirit of the Cross: may we, having divine promises, proceed to purify ourselves even as he who gave the promises is pure. We thank thee for all thy love. We are always little children in God's sight. Thou dost not go away from thy house, thy family, thy loved ones; thou dost gather us around thee in tender sympathy and earnest expectation, and thou dost gratify abundantly the desire of them

that hope in thee. Good is the name of the Lord; full are the hands of love; tearful are the eyes of pity. Guide us by thine eye; hold us by thine hand; yea, mightily defend us when we are alone and weak. Thou dost cover all the days with thy name; the morning has shone with thy smile, and the clouds have gathered to baptise us with thy blessing, and the sun has shone again to give us hope of the good things to come. Thou hast led us and upheld us and edified us; thou hast never forsaken us even for a small moment; thou hast turned our disappointments into prayers, and our prayers into psalms, yea, thou hast comforted us with exceeding consolation. Look upon us as individuals, as families, as men and women deeply engaged in the affairs of a mocking and transitory world; save us from selfishness, low-mindedness, and earthliness, and carnality, and lead us on the upward and heavenward way towards light and beauty and holiness and peace. Where there is secret sorrow of heart, multiply the abundance of thy consolation; where men are looking in the wrong direction for help, turn their eyes to the everlasting hills; when men's souls are failing them for fear, speak again thy gospel to them, that they may recover their gladness and renew their service. Pity us, one and all; let thy pity be our hope, and let our hope be turned to strength. So be with us until life's little day's work is all done, and we are called by way of the Cross to the city of God. Amen.

XII.

BIRTH AND RESURRECTION.

HAVE you ever compared or contrasted the birth and the resurrection of Christ? Or have you separated the birth and made it an event complete in itself? Then you have wronged it. Have you regarded the resurrection as a circumstance without an atmosphere, historical, ideal, spiritual? Have you detached it and looked upon it as one event only? If so, you have wronged it. There is nothing detached in the life of the Saviour. That life is a series of divine thoughts and sequences, culminating in something—even in “a country

out of sight." No man can stand on the top round of a ladder. The top of Jacob's ladder is hidden in the morning. Why have more rounds in a ladder than you can use? You have not, only you use them in different ways ; the use itself is always assured. So we can only go a certain way in our comparison and in our contrast, having birth and resurrection as the beginning and the intermediate end. Yet this should be a high spiritual study, with flashes of light at every step, and sounds of sweet and surging music now and then.

Who will write a short paper on the relation of the angels to the life of the Saviour?—how they have been neglected and overlooked in many cases, yet the angel wing flutters through the whole story, and it flutters through your story if you could hear it, which is to say, if you could believe it. Soul, you are not alone! At the birth we have angels singing, but distant, away yonder, somewhere on the margin of midnight. Morning on the upper side, night on the hither side, music running through all! How ideally beautiful! how the soul of poetry is in the very conception that the birth shall mean music! Sing, sing, all angel-voices of the morning-night! A double, hyphened word, from which even Homer would shrink! So paradoxical! Poetry at its best! The angels are distant, though they can bring themselves within speaking distance. It is a kind of music-speaking, that peculiar voice, so penetrating that it does not want the speaker to be seen, but to be heard as through a yielding wind. I hear them! Oh, hush your tumult to hear the angels sing! Singing, but far away. At the birth we have angels singing, at the resurrection we have angels silent. They will speak, but as it with reluctance. You should make your own song now—now that the

tomb is empty ; the angels are not going to find you either words or music. There is the empty tomb,—that is your poetry, that is your music. Find the words yourself. If you can look into that tomb and be dumb, you have not seen it.

How they sing ! The babe itself cannot sing. They seem to be moving in circles, all those great singers, without mechanical aid. They are themselves the very music that they sing. They have not forgotten to "bring" their music ; it is not something outside which they must "bring" with them. They were the music which they sang, and you and I must be the gospel which we preach. Angels announced both the events, both the birth and the resurrection. "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy." Why, he sings in the delivery of the message ! There is an angel-song, there is a latent song. Some voices have no music because some souls are dumb. The angel said—sang, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy" ; and at the resurrection the angel—the same angel, "He is not here !" Enough. If I had faith I would stop him there ; I do not want to know where he is. If he is not there, he will find me. I will not distress myself by asking on what mount he sits, or in what valley he meditates. He is not here in the tomb, in the prison, but wherever he is he will find me, and presently I shall hear him, chief of the angels, Lord of the hierarchies say, "Hail ! all hail !" and I shall know his voice : there is none like it !

At the birth the people came to him ; at the resurrection he came to the people. If we read aright, with the inner eyes, we shall know that it was always Jesus that came. The people came to him in a sense very tender and

pathetic, but they could not have come to him had he not first come to them. "We love him because he first loved us." "We have come from Persia with gold, and frankincense, and myrrh, and gifts of every kind,—where is he?" You could not have come if he had not come first. He comes in his humiliation, he will return in his majesty! At the resurrection he so returned. He was not at first recognised. He gave the body a new era. He ran out the epoch of the dust-body, the mud-man. He ran out the flesh, he did away with it. The best of the souls that had clung to him had to be educated to the new body. They saw the man, but they did not know the framework within which he stood. "God giveth it a body as it doth please him." A body of feathers, a body of flesh, a body of spirit—visible yet invisible; to be seen, but not to be touched. The Church is so dull of hearing, and so dull of sight, and so dull of sense altogether! It was always so. The disciples said, "We have brought thee a loaf," and he said, "Take it away; I have bread to eat that the world knoweth not of." The devil said, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." And Jesus said, "No. Thou knowest of one body only. It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone." There are bodies not of flesh.

At the birth all could see the little one, at the resurrection none could see him until he made himself denser, to accommodate himself to the vulgarity of their depraved senses. The birth was a promise. "This child is set for the rising and falling of many." "Go ye therefore and teach and illuminate, and curse and bless." I should not have thought that the little babe I saw in Bethlehem could have spoken in that tone. He could not then—in the Bethlehem time; he will be carried as a bundle into

Egypt. They who love him most will run away with him. But he will have his day—his turn. The tree grows ; the sapling is finally cut down for the building of navies. That the gospel should have grown into a command not vocal or verbal only, but be based upon a fact, a thing accomplished, a reality attested ! For while the grave was as it were nakedly open, he said, "Go ye and teach all nations." What is your text ? The empty tomb. Teach, not invent. Explain to them the meaning of the enigma—the empty tomb. Preach, preach the triumphant, the risen Lord,—one who went up as a flame, and now shines as a risen sun !

So we have something to say, a doctrine to tell the people ; but they are not listening to it much at present. I am not afraid because of their inattention. I do not weep and moan over these lapsed masses ; they do not worry me at all ; they do not cause me one moment's uneasiness—I will tell you why by-and-by.

The birth is a mystery, the resurrection is a solution. The birth, what can match it ! If this be the first note, to what thunder shall the last note rise ? It is all complete in the New Testament, and in the Old Testament forsooth ! The birth is the mystery which the resurrection matches as to its kindred quality ; it is indeed its consummation. The resurrection method was worthy of the birth method. Man had nothing to do with either. I am fond of Pilate, in a peculiar but definite way. I have a picture of him at which I look almost daily. He always affects me to tears. I am interested in the Pilate and Jew mob, and also in those poor long-cloaked, sweet-faced, nunlike—as we should say to-day—women, whose faces were hymns, whose looks were wounded hopes. I like the Pilate crowd, separating Pilate from the gang, because under the instiga-

tion of the Jews they did all sorts of nonsensical things. They rolled the stone—that is very good ; then they got what we should call no end of sealing-wax, and poured it out in a red stream ; then they got a signet, and the strongest of them sealed the stone. What wonder-workers they were ! They would never have built the stars. Anything more ? Yes, the best is yet to come. They “set a watch,” and the watch fell asleep ! Oh, what fools my Lord doth make of his enemies before he dashes them to pieces like a potter’s vessel ! Then the poor little prehistoric nuns, sisters of mercy before the time,—I see their long cloaks, and I peep under them, and, seeing their bundles, I ask, “What are these ?” And they, thinking that I must be some one of importance, or I should not be out so early in the morning, say, “Spices.” Then a change comes over my face, and a new tone into my voice, and I say, “Spices for what ?” He is not here ; he is risen. Take away your spices, scatter them in the dust, but do not go to the grave with them, to show that faith has been turned into unbelief, even though the unbelief be fragrant as a spice. We may have atheism in our very worship.

The resurrection ideally completes the birth. I knew the birth would not end in itself. Some things seem to say to us, “ You see exactly what I am—only a beginning, an outline, just a spectral arc ; you cannot see the whole circle. Why, if I were to end at this point, you yourself would say that I was ridiculous. You see that I mean something, don’t you ? ” When we see the resurrection as it is historically described in the gospels, we shall say, “ This is the meaning. I see, I see ! ” Just as I shall say when I see the great oak, if I live long ‘enough, “ This is the little acorn which my father planted.”

PHASES OF TEXTS.

PROFITABLE use may be made in some instances of single words as texts. It is, however, of the utmost importance not to use such isolated terms in any fantastic sense; they should be traced in their connection throughout the whole Bible. Take, for example, the word

Exceeding,

and see what striking use is made of it in various passages in the New Testament.

(1) "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with *exceeding great joy*" (Matt. ii. 10). It is impossible to follow the religious instinct sincerely and frankly, and yet keep our enthusiasm within limited bounds. True religious aspiration carries itself up into passion and rapture and ecstasy. Always suspect the religion which lives on low levels and is content with a low temperature.

(2) "Except your righteousness shall *exceed* the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom

of heaven" (Matt. v. 20). This is the true test of the joy which follows the seeing of the star. Such joy is not mere excitement; it passes into conduct, discipline, growth of the soul in the appreciation of high ideals and splendid moral possibilities. No man has set up the true ideal of character. This is to be found in Jesus Christ only. He is our righteousness as well as our peace. Never be content with the inferior while the superior is available.

(3) "My soul is *exceeding* sorrowful, even unto death" (Matt. xxvi. 38). Jesus Christ was intent upon a great purpose. As he brings exceeding joy to the believer, it is because of his own exceeding suffering. If we are partakers of the suffering, we shall also be partakers of the consolation. There is no death in Christ's sorrow. We must in our degree pass through the same bitterness, and through sorrow find our way to the Cross and to its exceeding pardon.

(4) "That sin . might become

exceeding sinful" (Rom. vii. 13). It is not enough to consider sin a mishap, an accident, a misfortune; it must be seen to be the abominable thing which God hates. We must see the sin and not the crime only. We must see its effect upon God as well as recognise its consequences upon ourselves. As we grow in holiness we shall grow in our detestation of evil.

In Ephesians i. 19, and also in Ephesians ii. 7, the Apostle makes use of the word "exceeding," coupling, as it were, "the *exceeding* greatness of his power" with "the *exceeding* riches of his grace." Many men have seen the greatness of power who have not seen the majesty of tenderness, grace, pity, compassion. The same Apostle speaks of "A far more *exceeding* and eternal weight of glory." He also assures the saints that "God is able to do *exceeding* abundantly above all that they ask or think." Paul will have nothing little, contracted, transient; he will have an eternal weight of glory, and he will have human thought and human expectation overwhelmed by the exceeding fulness of the divine pity and glory. Let us then realise that we have not come to a shallow pool, but to an infinite fountain, and let us further recognise that if we receive exceedingly we should also give exceedingly,—we should exceed in service, in suffering, in patience, and in the assurance that at last

God will justify his ways to man.

Notwithstanding.

This word, again, may often be regarded as marking a suggestive change in the course of the narrative, and thus may be accepted as a profitable rather than a fantastic text. Take instances:

(1) "Notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream." Here is the spiritual ministry of the world. God has many ways into the human mind. The dream-gate stands open night and day. We cannot account for impressions, impulses, sudden movements of the mind, and the like. We may regard such experience atheistically by driving it down to the level of mere accident, or we may regard it religiously as one of the forms in which God enters the tabernacle of the mind.

(2) "Notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." This is the true standard of measurement. The living daisy is greater than the most elaborate flower in wax; the tiniest life is a greater mystery than the most exquisite and massive statue. What would be admirable in a pagan might be contemptible in a Christian who has the whole ministry of grace at his disposal. Writing, or speaking, or painting, or any art

might excite admiration if regarded as the work of a little child, but the very same work might be held in contempt if offered as the effort of a full-grown man. The point to be magnified is that however great anything may be outside the Christ-idea, the very smallest thing done in the Christ-strength is greater—not greater in quantity, or spectacle, or ostentation, but greater in quality and in all the elements of duration and progress.

(3) "Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them" (Matt. xvii. 27). Here is the true prudence. Always distinguish between prudence and defiance, or between prudence and a technical righteousness. Paul did some things lest the ministry should be hindered. We are not to carry technicality up to such a point as to cause our good to be evil spoken of. There is a point in the line of developed prudence at which a wise man may firmly stand and say, "This is right; this might in some circumstances be insisted upon, notwithstanding, as it is not morally wrong to operate in a contrary direction, we may concede the point and pay tribute."

(4) "Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." (Luke x. 20). This is the real joy. This is not the joy of men who have found

a little pool of water, but the joy of men who have assuredly come to the very mouth of an inexhaustible well. Always rejoice at the right things. Many persons are busy wastefully—that is to say, they are busy in doing the wrong thing. It is exactly so with men: many souls rejoice at mere bubbles in the air as children would rejoice; but this is not the joy which men should appreciate. Get at the very centre of joy. There is no joy outside the fact of our being adopted into the very family of God.

(5) "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me" (2 Tim. iv. 17). This is the true strength. If a thousand men had been round the Apostle it would have been nothing if the Lord himself had not been present with the comfort and joy of his grace. Always ask if the Lord is near you. Have nothing to do with any work from which the Lord is absent.

(6) "Notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful" (James ii. 16). There is a giving that gives nothing; there may be a reply without an answer; we may mock the prayers of men. Always discover the point of real necessity, and address yourself to that. In a case of blindness do not direct your attention to the man's ears. In a case of a traveller being lost do not entertain him with music. In

the case of a man suffering pain do not attempt to cure him by changing his address. In all instances find out the precise need, and bring your helpful energy to bear upon it.

(7) "Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee" (Rev. ii. 20). There may be shadows on the blue. God does not address himself to our deficiencies unless they are vital. The few things may be the important things. If the thing you have against a watch or a clock is that it does not keep time, you destroy the watch, notwithstanding it may be set in a case of gold and made valuable by jewels. If your secretary is incapable of writing your letters, it is of small account that he is greatly gifted in playing outdoor games. The thing you have against him is not a mere accident, it is a charge which destroys his professional value.

"Sent forth to minister."—
HEB. i. 14.

The Revised Version, "Sent forth to do service for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation." (1) Insist upon the *reasonableness* of spiritual communion. The opposite theory is incredible. Think of all the spirits in heaven and on earth having no communion with one another! If I believe in spiritual

communion I exercise a rational faith; if I doubt it I exercise an irrational credulity. (2) Show that science is on the side of spiritual communion. Such communion implies continuity of life, and argumentatively establishes the unity of the whole human economy, unbroken by lapse of time or apparently accidental interruptions. Dwell upon the preciousness of continued sympathy as between the higher and the lower spiritual creation. (3) This conception is philosophical: it is based in reason; it satisfies noble aspirations; it interprets and confirms the doctrine of prayer. (4) The spiritual man has rich experience of spiritual communion. He does not talk of dreams, fancies, coincidences, unaccountable impressions, and the like; all these he recognises in their proper places, but he brings them all under a great and unifying law. (5) Notice the biblical confirmation of the doctrine. This is our rock as Christian spiritualists. "There stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve." "Peter saw in a vision." The "angel" liberated Paul and Silas.

If any man ask how spirit can communicate with spirit, he has given the answer in his very inquiry. The spirit will not communicate through the body. When angels come to me they

will not speak to my physical ear. The soul can listen. If it be objected that there is some uncertainty about the definiteness of the messages, I remind myself that uncertainty is an element in the higher education. It should stimulate our watchfulness; it should make us more spiritually critical lest we should interpret impressions and omens to our own advantage, and resist them when they call us to pain and loss as guarantees of our sincerity.

As a matter of fact the world has always had its prophet-minds representing the communication between the upper and the lower levels of life and experience. We have always had poets, interpreters, men of dominant mind,—these are the gifts of God to the human family. But have not such minds often made mistakes? Undoubtedly. And these mistakes have a great purpose to serve in human education. The possibility of error should always awaken the vigilance of conscience. Poets and prophets are not gods or masters to be invested with infallibility and worshipped as final oracles. "The best of men are but men at the best." There is but one true altar. There are many altars at which we may pay respect; there is only one altar at which we may offer worship.

"And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."—
2 KINGS vi. 17.

What is environment? In the fifteenth verse we have external and visible environment; in the seventeenth verse we have internal and invisible environment. Environment itself is individualised by temperament and habit. Some men are unconscious of their environment, seeing neither its advantages nor disadvantages. Other persons are so sensitive that they can feel what they cannot see. Knowledge comes through feeling as well as through intellect, through sensitiveness as well as through experiment. Put a debauchee into a refined environment, and the environment is lost upon him. Put a sordid man into elevated society, and he is at once rendered unhappy by the very conditions which would make another man truly glad. Put a Pharisee in the company of Christ, and at once he will feel that the social atmosphere is against him.

Do men really see their true environment? The servant of the prophet certainly did not,—the

environment was there, but was not perceived.

(1) Do not look at what are called "circumstances." They come and go, they change colour with the advancing or declining sun. There is something within circumstances to which we must steadfastly look. Guard the soul lest it become the victim of conditions and accidents. (2) It is the duty of man to overcome circumstances. There may be a lion in the way, but it is the duty of a strong man to drive him off the path. The sluggard will not sow because the wind is cold; the industrious man will not heed the wind, but will continue his necessary labour. (3) In all your calculations and estimates respecting life never omit the invisible. The visible can never be so large as the invisible. "He shall give his angels charge concerning thee." "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him." "Thine thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" The external should have a very limited effect upon the mind of those who live in God. He who is strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus can subdue the opposition of circumstances. Do not wish your burden less, but pray that your strength may be more. "I can do all things through Christ which

strengtheneth me." History has shown us that the most adverse circumstances can be overcome. We are not left to theory and speculation, we are standing in the very midst of men who by the grace that is in Christ Jesus have become kings and conquerors. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" What an environment was this! yet the heroic soul pierced the hostile army and came out more than conqueror.

"The harvest is past."—
JER. viii. 20.

The references in Scripture to the season of harvest may be collated greatly to our spiritual advantage.

(1) Harvest is a divine promise. In Genesis viii. 22 it is declared that "harvest shall not cease." We expect the harvest; we prepare for the harvest. We know nothing of an atheistic harvest. Harvest is one of the broadest seals of Providence.

(2) Harvest was associated with feasting. Read Judges ix. 27. In the olden times harvest was associated with every expression of joy: "They went out into the fields, and gathered their vineyards, and trode the grapes, and

made merry." Plentifulness has a music of its own. There are seasons of the year when we must be profoundly religious and gladsome, or fall out of the music of the occasion. Harvest should be a time of joy, because it is God's provision against hunger. God always gives us, if we are faithful to himself and to our opportunities, bread in advance. He gives the bread before the hunger comes, just as he gave the Atonement before the sin was committed. "Jesus Christ was slain from before the foundation of the world."

(3) Harvest was specially claimed by God. God gave all, and then commanded that part should be given back in recognition of his proprietorship. "Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits" (Exod. xxii. 29). "All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat" (Num. xviii. 12). "Thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, and shalt put it in a basket, and take it to the house of the Lord" (Deut. xxvi. 2). "And there came a man from Baal-shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits" (2 Kings iv. 42).

(4) Harvest is a great, practical symbol. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked." In the harvest-field read the whole lesson of life—the seed-time, the waiting-time, the ripening-time, the final

result. Notice, also, as part of the parable of life, that harvest is a co-operative result. Man does part, and God does part; we are "workers together with God." If we neglect the seed-time, God will not work a miracle in order to give us a plentiful harvest.

"This is the sum."—HEB viii. 1.

Again and again throughout the Scriptures we have a whole series of commandments, injunctions, or events, brought, as it were, into one condensed form. The text may be paraphrased thus: All the things we have said may be put into one chief point; if we forget all the words of elaboration, we can hardly forget the single sentence which involves and expresses all the history and reasoning. We should always look for the chief point. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter,"—give it to us in one word, set it out in its simplest form, express its vital purpose. "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah vi. 8). Here we have the whole Bible in one sentence, yet it requires the whole Bible to give the proper definition and illustration of the pregnant terms.

On one occasion Jesus Christ was required to name "the great commandment of the law." He instantly responded, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and mind, and strength." The true religion can be put into the fewest words. It is not a burden upon the memory, it is a joy in the heart. Jesus Christ made use of this principle of condensation. He always brought men to the point. "What wilt thou?" He wanted the prayer in a sentence. A man might have many petitions to offer, but Jesus Christ challenged him at once to produce his supreme desire. In coming to God we should know what is our uppermost thought, and should dwell upon that. Multiplicity of desire means confusion of thought. It is the same with saving faith. That saving faith is not an elaborate creed dependent upon nicety of terms; it is the supreme effort of the soul to realise the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Never fix upon any of the minor points of theological belief, but go straight to some great central doctrine and rest there, assured that what remains will be gradually unfolded to the obedient soul.

"Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God."—
PSALM lxxxvii. 3.

The influence of reputation. The Psalmist reports as if he had heard voice after voice proclaiming the glories of the city. The point is, What is said of cities, people, institutions? what fame have they created for themselves? We have not so much to do with the "glorious things" as with the fact that they were "spoken" of the city of God. What is said of the Church in the valleys, in the fields, in the market-places? Has the Church created for itself a great name? Is it known as a school of politics, or a club of discussion, or as a house of healing and blessing? Fame is itself a responsibility. A name may be a tower of strength. "A good name is better than riches." Every citizen of the city should remember that the reputation of the city depends, in some measure, upon himself. Countries are famed for specialities—some for gold, some for diamonds, some for wheat, some for gorgeous flowers or singing birds. So it should be with the Church. It should be famed for everything precious, beautiful, comforting, inspiring. Glorious things are spoken of the Church of Christ, as, for example (1) It is associated with the profoundest and noblest ideas that

ever challenged the mind of man. Think of its ideas of God, of man, of sin, and redemption, and character, and the great future—unknown, but infinitely solemn. (2) It is associated with the noblest service which man can render to man,—deeds of healing, and love, and sympathy, and all manner of kindly help. (3) No man ever came away from Christ saying that Christ was unable to deal with a case so intricate and perplexing as his. The gospel covers all the necessities of human life. It lights every chamber of the soul. It leads little children, and it blesses old men. Glorious things are spoken of the Church of Christ, because itself is a “glorious Church.” It is not only that glorious things should be spoken of the Church; the Church should be worthy of its most glorious fame. Never let the Church sink into a common institution, a merely social federation; let it be held in highest honour as the special creation of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. We cannot live upon the reputation of others. It is not enough that glorious things were once spoken of the Church; it should be a glorious Church this very day in the lives of its active and devoted citizens. The word “glorious” is sparingly used in the New Testament, but always significantly and emphatically. We read of a “glorious gospel,” and we are blessed with a “glorious

liberty,” and we are finally to be constituted into a “glorious Church.”

“These men are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.”—
ACTS ii. 15.

The point is that the Apostle Peter returned the most obvious reply to the mocking Jews. The power of an answer is often to be found in its very obviousness. It is as if the Apostle had said, “In making this charge against us the accusation is absurd on the very face of it. It is only nine o’clock in the morning; to think that all these people should be drunk at so early an hour is simply ridiculous.” The Apostle did not enter into an elaborate defence of the inspired Christians, he simply brushed away the absurdity that they could, at so early an hour, be drenched with strong drink. A special curse had been denounced against men who rose up early that they might drink wine. It was considered the coarsest and basest of outrages. It was thus that Peter chose his line of defence, and I think that his line is to-day the very best that could be taken in relation to all the assaults that are made upon Christian theology and practice. We may save ourselves

much trouble by giving the obvious, rather than the recondite, reply to men who are antagonistic in relation to Christian doctrine and claim. All the assaults that have been made upon the Christian position are, to my mind, simply absurd, and beyond the point of absurdity I need not seek to reduce them.

(1) Creation, as we know it, cannot have made itself, seeing that no thing which we do know was self-made. If a gas-jet did not make itself, it is simply absurd to say that the stars created their own magnitude and light. If the chair I sit on did not make itself, it is to me absurd to suggest that the sun and moon made themselves. If everything we do know had an author or a maker, the probability is that all the things which lie beyond our intelligence were created, and set in order by an adequate power, and that power a Personality and an Intelligence. Let us, then, dismiss, as obviously preposterous, the notion that the universe made itself.

(2) Christian enthusiasm is more than mere excitement, seeing that Christians get nothing by their enthusiasm but persecution and suffering and loss. The Pentecostal men did not live in kings' houses, or wear soft raiment, or enjoy social favours; they had to pay heavily for their so-called excitement. It is simply absurd,

therefore, in face of the fact that such suffering awaited them, that they simulated an enthusiasm utterly contrary to their real feeling. Treat the suggestion as simply preposterous. Men do not willingly go to jail simply that they may indulge in some religious explosion; the reason of their action lies deeper than such an absurd suggestion. Christians are taxed at every point. Their religion is not a sentiment, but a discipline. Their faith is symbolised by a cruel cross. Let that be our answer to men who suggest that religious enthusiasm is mere excitement, or some species of intoxication.

(3) The Bible cannot have been composed by a set of designing impostors, seeing that no book burns imposition and hypocrisy in so fierce a flame. It is absurd to think that bad men would have written so much in favour of goodness, and so have condemned themselves to the execration of mankind. The whole book calls to holiness, and honesty, and sincerity. To suggest that it was composed, or edited in any way, by impostors is to impose the severest tax upon the credulity of mankind.

These are the obvious answers to such foolish accusations. The same line of reply may be utilised along the whole line of anti-Christian attack. There are, of course, metaphysical and far-reaching

answers to the assaults which have been made upon the Christian position. We are not in any degree undervaluing these, but simply pointing out that frequently the most obvious reply may be the most pertinent and effective. To tell me that I made myself, and that I have directed my own life in all its issues, is neither more nor less than to affront my consciousness and my intelligence. Peter did not content himself with giving the obvious reply, he went on to show that the enthusiasm was nothing less than the fulfilment of an ancient prophecy, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." So we can say of creation this is the work of the living God; of Christian passion, this is the mystery of the Holy Ghost; of the Holy Scriptures, herein we find eternal life. The reply from the point of obviousness will always be the more effective in the degree in which there are behind it the psalms and the prophecies with which God has inspired and comforted the ages.

"Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again."—
JOHN iv. 13.

Temporary satisfactions. Jesus Christ always recognised the two natures of man—the physical and the spiritual He provided

for both. He said, in effect, God is as certainly the author of your body as he is of your soul, and as he has made provision for the one, so also has he made provision for the other. It is utterly unthinkable that God should have provided for the body, and should have omitted to make any provision for the soul. The very fact that he has made man carries with it the further fact that he has made every possible provision for the growth and culture and completion of the highest of his earthly creatures. An awful delusion which overpowers the mind is that what is good enough for the body is good enough for the soul. We forget that the two natures are entirely dissimilar. Many a man feeds his body and starves his soul. Man commits himself to the astounding paradox that if he will attend to his body the soul will attend to itself. This is the radical error of human depravity. It comes up in its most appalling form in the case of a man who, as to the body, is almost an idolater, but who, as to the soul, really starves his immortality. We should think with horror of a house without bread; yet we may think with complacency of a house without a book. The highest provision for the soul is not intellectual, but spiritual. We must live and move and have our being in

God. We willingly connect our bodies with the great ministries of nature, sunshine, air, and water, and all the chemistry of nature. We should think it criminal to neglect duties of this kind. We are perfectly right in so thinking, but are we not guilty of an incredible self-contradiction when we cultivate the body and neglect the soul? You cannot feed a soul with gold. Precious stones cannot answer the deepest desires of the heart when it awakens to a full consciousness of its own quality and capacity.

Jesus Christ knew precisely what materialism could do and what it could not do. He did not condemn or undervalue things material. In effect he said, "These things are essential. You must have bread, and light, and air; you will be criminal if you neglect the right use of these; but clearly understand that they do not reach the condition and necessity of the soul." That is the strong position which the Christian religion takes up. It allows that money has a place, that health is important, that all the influences of nature are remedial and energising; and then it proceeds to say that the higher nature has its appetences, for whose satisfaction God has made abundant provision.

In all earthly things we soon reach the point of satiety. Silver went for nothing in Jerusalem in

the days of Solomon simply because of its abundance. The glutton begins his feast with zest, and ends it with loathing and disgust. A man may have so much gold and silver as to be really poor. Pleasure soon cloys. Now in distinction from this sating and self-exhausting enjoyment stands the spiritual culture of our highest nature. There is no satiety in communion with God. There is no satiety in the acquisition of true knowledge. The lower man may be loaded to suffocation; the more the higher man has, the more he desires, because his aspirations and conceptions partake of the very nature of the deity on whose goodness he lives. When your child is sick, will repairing the roof of the house recover him of his ailment? When the ship is being wrecked will the enjoyment of a feast mitigate the unspeakable agony? We should always consider the harmony of things—that is to say, the proper relation of things. Things may be important in themselves, but may stand in a wrong relation to the supreme requirements of life. A man may drink the Bank of England dry, and he will presently thirst again for another river of gold.

Jesus Christ says, "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst," yet Jesus did not despise the water

of Jacob's well. Everything in its own place. Jesus healed the body that he might find a way into the soul to work a better cure. The living water is ready. Every man must drink for himself. "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" (John vii. 37).

"My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."—JOHN v. 17.

The whole universe is at work. There is no standing still. God is the greatest worker of all. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you." We must fully realise the continual action within whose scope we live. The whole universe is dead against inactivity.¹ Even what appears to be repose may be energy at its supreme point. Are there not twelve hours in the day? Every flower works. Every bird is carrying out some part of the divine economy. Everywhere we have energy of one degree or another—the great wind, or the earthquake, or the rending fire, or the still small voice.

Jesus Christ represents himself as in special alliance with the Father in the working out of decree and purpose. Jesus

Christ works with God (1) in the making of man; in the very creation of man; there is not a tissue or a pulse in man with which Jesus Christ is not directly associated. (2) Jesus Christ works with God in the preservation of society. Never forget that society is a unit as well as an individual man. We are apt to think of society as an aggregation of units, whereas it is, in reality, an organised and inspired unity. There is a wonderful operation of law, at present imperfectly understood, which distributes the sexes, which regulates the number of the population, which directs the whole process of nation-making. (3) Jesus Christ works with God in the balancing of social conditions. "The poor ye have always with you." This is not a mere social accident; it is part of a great social plan. The little children are with us, to bring out the best qualities of our nature. The poor are always with us, to create an outlet for Christian philanthropy. The sick are always with us, to chasten us in our pride and self-idolatry.

Let us remember in all our working that there is a working higher than ours. We can touch but surfaces and aspects of things; but God can penetrate the heart, taking away the heart of stone, and replacing it with a heart of flesh. "All things

work together for good to them that love God." "We are fellow workers with God." In all our reviews of social condition, revolution, depression, and excitement, let us calm ourselves with the one certainty that the Lord reigneth.

"Things that come into your mind."—EZEKIEL xxxviii. 10.

This is an aspect of what we call omniscience. It is, so to say, omniscience brought into detail. How do things come in the mind? The mind itself cannot tell. These "things" are indeed part of ourselves,—perhaps they are our very selves. Things that come into the mind are not always things that come out in the life. We are often two contradictory selves. Who knows the philosophy of suggestion? It is easy enough to follow that law when two minds are in consultation, but what about the mind in its hours of self-consultation? What about spontaneous and inscrutable suggestion? We say, "It suddenly occurred to me," or, "It struck my mind," or, "I felt sure that something was going to happen." We know what it is to talk to ourselves—in other words, to think aloud. Some resolutions we carry by mental majorities—that is to say, we balance one consideration with

another; sometimes conscience is on one side and inclination is on the other; sometimes self-interest and pure justice come into violent collision; sometimes a disadvantage is overpowered by a compensation, and the result is often founded, not upon a unanimous vote of the faculties or inclinations of the mind and moral nature, but upon what may be termed the majority of votes.

The great thing to be remembered is that God is perfectly familiar with all our mental processes. We should not only admit this in theory, but accept it in all the breadth and urgency of its meaning. "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. iv. 13). "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth." "There is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether." Collate passages of Scripture bringing out this fact in many varieties of application. God knows our motive, our purpose, our unexpressed reasonings. He knows when we operate apparently for one reason, while, in reality, we are under the influence of another. "The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow." Who dare pray for full

enlightenment? Who dare look into the secret places of his own heart? Yet we should pray that God would make us know ourselves, however hideous and distressing the revelation may be.

We partly understand the meaning of the divine reading of the soul by our own use of mechanical instruments. Looking at a speck of dust with the naked eye, we could declare positively that it was without motion; looking at the same speck of dust through a microscope, we could see that it was alive and in almost excited motion. If the speck of dust were conscious it could defy the naked eye, knowing that the naked eye could see nothing of the reality of the case. But the same speck of dust if conscious would quail under the application of the microscope; so we should quail under the searching of the divine eye. Look up into the mid-day sky, and who can affirm, on the authority of the unaided vision, that there is a single star in the firmament? But accept the assistance of astronomical instruments, and, behold, what fields of glory are brought within their sweep! The unassisted ear can hear but near and common noises and sounds. Apply the microphone, and you may hear the motion of a fly upon a pane of glass or on a plastered ceiling. These things ought to teach us modesty in determining our own

environment. They ought also to teach us the greatness of God, and how terrible a thing it is to fall into his hands in an impenitent and defiant state.

"He commanded." — MARK vi. 39.

Notice how wide a reach is taken by the commandments of Jesus Christ. A very wonderful thing indeed that Jesus Christ should have given commandments! When we consider the range and the issues of those commandments it is impossible to classify Christ as a mere man. His commandments are often revelations. God commanded, Christ commands. "I and my Father are one." Look at the range of the commandments of Christ:

(1) He commanded the sea; he commanded the winds and the waves,—here is a wonderful instance of mind over matter. Nowhere in the case of Christ was mind baffled by what is merely material. Taken ideally, this is one of the sublimest pictures in the life of Christ. He and the sea confront each other as in opposition; it is the word that succeeds, not the wave. This is infinitely more than it seems to be. This is nothing less than triumph of the mental over the material.

(2) Jesus Christ commanded the devils, "Come out of him, thou unclean spirit." This carries us one point higher. In the one case we had the triumph of mind over matter, in the second case we have the triumph of character over depravity. Jesus Christ came into the world to destroy the works of the devil. The superiority of mind over matter requires to be balanced by the superiority of holiness over unholiness. The intellectual all-sufficiency must be balanced by the morally adequate. The miracles wrought in matter must be only symbolic of the higher miracles wrought in spirit.

(3) Jesus Christ commanded the multitudes. It was not merely one against many; it was the higher relation of Fulness against Necessity. In mere numbers Jesus Christ was in a minority; but in his power to meet the hunger of the world numbers went for nothing before his surging and impartial beneficence. He who holds the bread commands the world. It is easy to fall down before any commandment that offers the soul bounty and satisfaction and comfort. "And Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." When the world is persuaded that Jesus Christ is the true bread which cometh down from heaven, his command will go forth amongst men as an irresistible and welcome force.

(4) Jesus Christ commanded his disciples. This must be taken into account in estimating the range and quality of his nature. Jesus Christ was never commanded by the disciples. They always waited for his word. The morning did not shine until he rose. There was no terror in the night so long as his eye could be seen. This represents the relation of supremacy and subjection. In that relation the Church must always stand to Christ. The Church does not make her own laws. She receives her legislation from the Cross.

"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." Understand that the gospel is a commandment as well as a promise, an authority as well as a benediction, a kingdom as well as a condescension. "A new commandment I give unto you." Never forget the Christian dispensation has its Sinai, its holy mount, whence the new commandments are proclaimed by spiritual voices.

**"I have seen all the works
that are done under the sun."**—
ECCLES. i. 14.

Solomon was no doubt telling what he believed to be the truth. In a rough and superficial sense Solomon's testimony may be regarded as true. In reality,

Solomon did not know what he was talking about. No man knows what the sun is, and no man knows what the earth is, except in a general sense. The earth is always new. Roughly speaking, there is nothing new under the sun; but critically speaking, every morning is a novelty, and every blade of grass is a new miracle. We must seek for newness not so much in appearances as in the vision of the inner life of things. A man may say he has seen all the alphabet, and in a very narrow sense that is true. The alphabet in single letters is one thing, the alphabet in combination represents the total literature of the world! There may be some six and twenty letters in the alphabet, but who can count the libraries into which those six and twenty letters have been turned? So a man may have seen a rough mapping of the nations, the continents, and the islands of the world, but the inter-relation of these, and all the necessary evolution of such inter-relation, will be a miracle and a surprise to the end of time.

Solomon's experience is proof enough that the finite is not able to satisfy the discontent and aspiration of the soul. If that doctrine could be truly believed a great revolution would take place in human thinking and conduct. Men have been seeking the right thing in the wrong place—that is to say, men have been

seeking immortal pleasures in mortal sources. The finite always sates the soul. "Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee" (Prov. xxv. 16). A man may drink so much wine as not to know that he is drinking wine at all. A man may have a million-pound note in his hand, perfectly genuine, and yet may not be able to get through a turnpike gate for want of sixpence. One of the foundation-truths of experience is, that it does not allow mortality to satisfy the aspirations of immortality. The world can grow corn enough for the body, but it cannot grow corn for the soul. Out of this fact comes the whole idea of religious desire, speculation, prayer, and the wonder which is often both sadness and joy.

I have known a man so self-sufficient as to have no conscious need of prayer. The man has simply lived in the flesh, he has sown to the flesh, he has quenched his spirit, he has gone down to the lowest point in the scale of life. Not knowing, not realising, that he had a soul, he did not feel his need of God. It is quite possible to live that kind of life; man has the liberty, but not the right, to destroy all the characteristics which make him a man.

The experience of Solomon is simply invaluable. We needed precisely such testimony to complete the educational range of the

Bible. If the Bible had ignored the existence of the devil, it would have been infinitely less to us than it is to-day. So if the Bible had excluded the testimony of the pessimist, it would have been an incomplete book, and men might have complained that it took no notice of certain conspicuous temperaments and conditions. But here is the testimony of the pessimist. Here is the worldling at his best. And what does the world come to in the esteem of the man who had all its riches and attractions at command ? It comes to "vanity of vanities, and vexation of spirit."

If, however, we look at this same world from the right point of view, it becomes full of symbol and parable and holy sacrament. Detach the world from the providence of God, and it shrivels into a wilderness ; its beauty becomes ashes, and its music an empty noise. On the other hand, connect the world with God, with Providence, with Redemption, and with all the ministry of Christ, and the world becomes a nursery, a school, a training-ground, the opening and the seal of immortality. Christians are to use the world as not abusing it. They are to read parables in the lilies, and to see covenants in the out-spread wings of the fowls of the air. They are to realise the due proportion of things ; they are never to mistake the beginning for the end.

Solomon was both right and wrong in his estimate of things : right, if he regarded them as self-contained and self-ending,—then, in very deed, they are vanity and vexation of spirit ; but wrong, wholly and fatally wrong, if the things round about us, constituting the framework and the environment of life, are parts of a process swiftly moving and swiftly changing lines in a great action. This is the view which Christians take of the world. They see nothing as it really is. Assured of Providence, they calmly wait the issue of things, and escape the temptation which is suggested by premature judgment and insufficient knowledge.

"At evening time it shall be light."—ZECH. xiv. 7.

Wonderful things are said in Scripture about the evening and the night—portions of time with which we do not associate any activity or excitement. For example : (1) "So he giveth his beloved sleep," or "sleeping" ; that is, whilst they are taking rest in sleep, he is arranging matters for them, so that when they wake in the morning their course will be made clear. Sometimes we are doing everything, and doing it best, when we are doing nothing. (2) At night Jesus went up into a mountain apart to pray. Others

might be sleeping, he was praying. When man is doing least, God may be doing most. It is proclaimed of the Lord God of Israel that he neither sleepeth nor slumbereth. (3) "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee."

(1) The text indicates completion. The day is over. The seed is sown. The plough can go no farther because of the gathering night. There is a healthy fatigue. We rest in the Lord when we have done the Lord's work in the Lord's own gracious spirit. "The sleep of the labouring man is sweet." This is true of all industry. Sleep comes as a reward, a kind of heaven, a satisfying benediction.

(2) The text indicates the end of uncertainty. The soul is not plunged in darkness; an eventide is granted to it in which the sun is one red glow transfiguring the clouds into every possible expression of colour. The Lord grants a period of reflection, contemplation, a time of gradual relaxation from the stress of life. Eventide has its own light, its own star, its own cloudlessness. We must distinguish between the day and all its splendour, night and all its gloom, and evening with its diamond star and holy calm. Old age has its own youth.

(3) The text indicates the true time of complete judgment. Wait until the evening! Wait until the work has been fully done! Here is scope for large application

of the truth. We may apply it to difficult providences. True they are entangled and impenetrable now, full of sorrow, full of contradiction, full of temptation and unbelief. But wait until the evening! "At evening time it shall be light." Or we may apply this text to personal character. We may be mysteries to ourselves at some periods of moral development; other men may be mysteries to us, so much so that we are unable to say whether they are good or bad. Our duty is to wait until the evening time. We shall know men better when we ourselves have grown better and they have grown riper.

The evening and the morning belong to one another in making up the whole day of life. We shall be speaking in strict accordance with all that we know of nature and of life if we reaffirm the well-established truism that as the harvest is the result of the seed-time, so the evening may tell what the day has been. Evening is the harvest of day. What we do in our activity we shall reap in our repose. If I would have the calm evening time free from remorse, free from tormenting spirits, I must live my life-day faithfully, loyally, unsparingly, as a servant of the divine crown.



"Ye are not under the law, but under grace."—ROM. vi. 14.

Yet we are under law! This is not contradiction, but expansion. There is a law which includes all other laws. Grace itself is law in its highest aspect and brightest light. Without law there may be licence, wantonness, self-idolatry, but there can be no grace. Law is unfinished until it comes to grace. Labour must become music. When a man can sing at his work without neglecting it, he may be said to be under grace in his day of labour. We may outlive law, simply because we have obeyed law. Obedience is the last result of service—not obedience under fear of penalty, but obedience because it has become part of the habit of the soul. The two commandments of the law are commandments to love. The love does not come first. We must sow before we reap.

In the whole course of life we pass through law to grace. It is so in our very speech. Not until we so know the grammar of our native tongue as to be practically unconscious of it can we speak with confidence and ease and elegance. We do not speak by reciting a rule of syntax after the construction of every sentence; we so know the syntax that we can afford to do without mechanical reference. So to say, the grammar is in us, in our very

souls, part of our very breath,—so, in reality, we pay no painful heed to it, for it has become part of our nature. It is so with grace. We do not look at the commandments to see whether we are obeying them; they are in us, a living word—as, indeed, a testimony by which our life is sustained. We do not really obey commandments so long as we have need to read them in their literal form. At a certain period of development such reading is necessary; but afterwards the commandment passes into the beatitude, and we enter into the joy of our Lord.

Along this line of illustration we approach a clear conception of the kingdom of Christ: (1) it is founded on law; (2) it blossoms into grace; (3) it kindles into glory; (4) it culminates in God. Jesus Christ had his commandments, for he revealed a kingdom. Jesus Christ was different from Moses, in that the law came by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ. Jesus brings grace up to glory when he sets himself forth as the Light of the world. The whole mystery of service culminates in the sovereignty and fatherhood of God.

There is no deadlier mistake than to suppose that a man can be so under grace as to be superior to law.

"And Nebo, and Baal-meon, (their names being changed,) and Shibmah: and gave other names unto the cities which they builded."—NUM. xxxii. 38.

Carefully note the limited use of names. Take your own name. In reality you may be said to have two names—the one is the Christian name, the other is the surname. Note the vital distinction between the two. The first name may be purely fanciful; it may be John or Mary, Daniel or Sarah—that is nothing. That name was given to you because of some whim or fancy, or momentary taste. It is infinitely different with the surname. In the surname we have hereditary, historical association, continuity that can only be varied by law. The surname is your true history. Your parents had choice of fifty names as to the first, but they had no choice as to the second. Cannot a man change even his second name? Yes; but only by due process of law. A man cannot conceal himself under *aliases*. It is the same with religious designations. We may be said to have names and surnames even in our Christian life. The first name may be Episcopalian, Methodist, Presbyterian, and the like; but the surname is Christian, and that is unchangeable.

God can change names, and he always changes them for larger and better meanings. He chang'd Sarai into Sarah, and thus carried up the name into royalty. He changed Jacob into Israel, and thus made him also a prince in his royal house. He changed Saul into Paul. Jesus Christ himself proceeded by law in this matter of the evolution of names; for in names, as in all things else, there is a law of evolution and expansiveness. Jesus Christ said, "Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends." He only can create such historical points, and give a new calendar for the use of his Church. Jesus Christ gives his sainted ones a "new name." What that name will be we shall not know until the day break and the shadows flee away.

Change of name may mark progress. It is so in military life,—captain, major, colonel. The man is the same, but the officer is changed.

Names may be stolen. The label may remain upon a vessel whilst the contents have been changed. The name may be an irony. A clown may be called Milton. A thief may be called Justus. An unbeliever may be called Simeon. On the other hand, names that have been dishonoured may be lifted up into new significance. A man may be called Ananias and may yet speak the truth. A man may

be called Iscariot and yet not lose his apostleship. If we have inherited dishonoured names it lies within the power of the grace of God for us to lift such names into good repute. We may not be able to control the beginning of our life, but God will enable us to make the end glorious. When we assume the name of Christ let us be sure that we also breathe the spirit of Christ. "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Many will say, "Have we not cast out devils in thy name?" Yet Jesus may answer, "I know you not." Christianity is not only a name; it is a spirit, an enthusiasm, a crucifixion!

"Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"—ISA. liii. 1.

Men who work in any department of life are naturally anxious to know the results of their labour. This anxiety may be unduly encouraged. The one thing to be steadily kept in view is that the gospel itself shall be preached with all fulness and solicitude, leaving issues entirely in the hand of God. There is a natural anxiety the cultivation of which may greatly assist us in seizing opportunities and realising

responsibilities. No minister of Christ should build himself up in the delusion that it is no matter to him what becomes of the gospel. The gospel cannot be preached by any man who is under the influence of such a spirit. All the great workers of history have toiled in the spirit of hope, and only as they have seen the prophetic morning piercing the clouds of the immediate present have they been able to hold on in their often discouraging course.

The inquiry of the text is surrounded by an atmosphere most helpful to the realisation of the right answer. Whatever the immediate reference of the prophet may have been, Christians must hold to the conviction that only one name in all human history covers the entire ground of the prophet's portraiture. The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah is a full-length portrait of the Lord Jesus Christ. Prophecy has to be interpreted by history. It is legitimate to take back the lamp of history and by its light to peruse the prophecies which startled the early ages of the spiritual world. We may fairly challenge all men to produce a figure in history which exhibits all the lineaments of Isaiah's grand portrayal. Beginning at the lowliest possible points, we have before us a tender plant,

a root out of a dry ground, a personality without form or comeliness, an incarnation so destitute of beauty that no one desires its further and fuller acquaintance. These were in a sense negative disadvantages. But the prophet adds a most tragical positive colour to his repellent delineation, for he describes the person of the text as despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, from whom men averted their faces, and upon whom they poured their contempt. What wonder he should inquire as to the result of his "report," or demand to see any one to whom the arm of the Lord had been revealed? God disappoints nations, and sometimes practically insults them, by sending deliverers in whom there is no apparent strength, and kings without visible crown and sceptre.

God has always honoured and enthroned well-borne and sanctified sorrow. Sorrow is at the very heart of joy. The man of the text carried other people's griefs and made other people's sorrow a bitter personal distress.

The view of human nature given by the prophet is what we now term evangelical: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." This was, if we may so express it, the problem which lay before the divine mind. The world had gone astray, wandered

far into the wilderness of disobedience, and the inquiry which the Lord put to himself was, in effect, "How can this state of things be reversed? How can the world be reclaimed?" Reclamation was a point impossible to stop at; so the prophecy goes forward to wounding and bruising and the cutting off of the priestly life. These are great mysteries. The gospel is a great mystery with these difficulties inherent in it; but it would be an infinitely greater mystery without them.

After the night of sore distress comes the morning of hope. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." The Saviour must be infinitely greater than the sin. It is not enough that he should drive it into despair and death; he must have reserve enough of power to triumph over it openly and to defeat it with infinite strength. The Saviour who has done so much for the world shall divide portions with the great, and shall divide the spoil with the strong. It is impossible that any mere man could represent or fulfil the tragical prophecies of this chapter. If the chapter is a romance it must have a romantic explanation. If any man has dreamed the depravity herein depicted, he must also dream a power equal to its extirpation. As Christians it is our joy to believe that the prophet spoke under the inspiration of the

Holy Ghost, and that from afar he saw Bethlehem and Calvary and Olivet. So the chapter which opens with an inquiry which expresses a thrilling pain, ends with the assurance that the gospel faithfully preached will issue in a redeemed and perfected world.

Ezekiel xii.

This chapter is full of divine judgment, and is about the most terrible reading within the whole range of Scripture. On account of the sin of Israel, God declares that his eye will not spare, neither will he have pity, and he will be known to his alienated children by a new name, "The Lord that smiteth." The whole army was disabled on account of sin and by reason of the judgment which followed it. The trumpet was blown, but no soldier replied to the thrilling blast. Who can rise up against the wrath of God and see how to fight when the darkness of the divine judgment is as a burden upon his eyes? So great was to be the fear of the Lord upon sinful Israel that hands were reduced to feebleness and all knees were as weak as water. Gold and silver would have no attractions for the souls that had lost their God. The loss was great in every point of view, but the greatest loss of all was stated in the words, "My face will I turn also from them." Under

the figure of "a chain" the great captivity is set forth; the worst of the heathen were to possess the houses of Israel, and their holy places were to be defiled by the feet of strangers. The divine resources of judgment were declared to be inexhaustible: "Mischief shall come upon mischief, and rumour shall be upon rumour," and the whole air was to be alive with divine vengeance.

(1) It is impossible to think that the human mind originated such maledictions. There is a kind of judgment which man could not have invented. We may find inspiration even in the darkest parts of Holy Writ. Consider what these judgments are, and find God within them as within a tabernacle of darkness.

(2) In all the tempest of the judgment the moral reason is not ignored. The Lord is judging sin, and he is punishing the forgetfulness which amounts to blasphemy. This is not blind vengeance. The Lord who holds the sword in one hand holds the violated law in the other.

(3) Learn from this state of things to what depths of degradation and misery even the elect of God may sink. The judgment is not upon the heathen; it is upon the house of Israel. Neglected election becomes the most appalling rejection. What shall be his fall who plunges from the highest mountain into the deepest

abyss? "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

(4) The greatest judgment of all, as has just been pointed out, was the withdrawal of the divine face; and the second is like unto it, as depicted in the twenty-sixth verse. The people would seek a vision, and there would be none; they would cry for a prophet, but there was no prophet to hear; they would desire a priest, but no holy man would answer their selfish prayer. There is a time when we shall desire a repetition of old institutions, ordinances, opportunities, but they will have vanished never to return.

(5) God's great purpose was the revelation of himself to people who had abandoned his altar: "And they shall know that I am the Lord." That is the gracious purpose of judgment. The blighted harvest will be to us a festival if it bring us in penitence to our knees. The child's grave will be an open way to heaven if we have seen in the child's death the loving purpose of God. We shall look back upon divine judgments as divine blessings if they have brought us to the Cross and its infinite pardon.

"Who will bring me into the strong city?"—PSALM lx. 9.

The Psalmist is full of triumph. He has seen, as it were, the end

of his enemies. He represents God himself as speaking in his holiness and exceedingly rejoicing in the victories which have fallen to the divine banner. It would seem as if David had his eye upon a still further conquest. He would break up the rocky fortresses of Edom. But who could accomplish a feat apparently so impossible? Man could not help him. His hope is in God, notwithstanding that God had cast off his people because of unfaithfulness. The Psalmist is quite sure that the mercy of God will magnify itself against his holy wrath. Taking his side, as it were, at the right hand of God, Edom sinks beneath his feet, and its gates of rock crumble away before the touch of his very fingers. The Psalmist is mighty in God's almighty. If it were a question between the individual man and the fortified Edom, the Psalmist could make no progress against his impregnable enemy. But the Christian is more than a man when he sets out upon the business of God.

A question such as we find in the text may be utilised along the whole line of life. (1) Do not underrate the positions which you wish to conquer and subdue. Recognise the strength of the cities you would take in holy war. The Psalmist did not think of Edom as a paper city, which would vanish at the first touch of fire; he knew that the city was hewn out,

as it were, of a rock, and that its bastions were as flint which resisted every stroke. (2) Never be afraid of the city on the ground that it is "strong." Error, superstition, custom, fashion, prejudice, reluctance, are strong cities, but they can be taken in any war of which Jesus is the Captain. Never say this habit is too strong for me, or this cabal, or this stubborn custom in society; undoubtedly they are strong, and undoubtedly in your own strength you would be unable to subdue them, but you fight in a strength that is not your own and under the inspiration of a promise that has never failed. (3) Who will take the strong city of heathenism? There is a call for missionary labour. (4) Advance towards conquest is often gradual; it is even sometimes slow. Is there not some hint of this in the second part of this ninth verse? "Who will lead me into Edom?" It would seem as if the process were one step at the time. The emphasis is not upon the "me," but upon the "lead," and being upon the "lead" is still more deeply and intensely on the "who." (5) We are never so near victory as when we are humbly conscious that it is beyond our personal reach. When our strength gives way God clothes us with his own power. (6) Here is encouragement to young men who, in the strength of God,

undertake to enter and subdue the strong city of life. Their conquest must not be selfish. Not to possess themselves of the city, but to benefit the city of which they are possessed, is the true object of all holy war.

The tenth verse should be connected with the text as showing how yearningly the godly heart turns to divine sources when great issues are to be compassed and established. The army without God is an army of dry wood, ready for the devouring spark. God with the army is omnipotence leading weakness to complete and final triumph.

"O give thanks unto the Lord; for" —PSALM CXXXVI. 1.

This is a great song. Some songs are mere sounds, without fact and without logic—a mere rattle and trick of educated breath. The point to be noticed in connection with this psalm is that in every instance a specific reason is given for the singing of the holy song. This is history set to music. This is divine providence clothed with its singing-robe and calling upon the whole earth with all its accumulated ages to lift on high the banner of God's undivided praise. This is not singing for singing's sake. Underneath the song is creation, or providence, or experience, or special enjoyment

of the divine presence. The sovereign point is that every song can give a substantial reason for being sung. Take a few examples:

"O give thanks unto the Lord ; for he is good." That is the reason — self-evident, personal, undeniable. It is lawful to address songs of majesty, but it is graciously compulsory to sing songs to goodness. The Psalmist interprets the word "good" by the word "mercy," saying, "His mercy endureth for ever." Why should not the song be as long as the mercy ? When the mercy ceases the song may terminate.

"To him who alone doeth great wonders." The practice of the song now varies, the reason being given first. Christians are not called upon to praise an anonymous or even a vague sovereignty of creation. The Christian praises the God who made the heavens, who stretched out the earth above the waters, and who made the great lights of day and night.

This would be, in a sense, mere deism : so the Psalmist proceeds to specific providences, and to experiences that could be tested at many points : "To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn : to him which divided the Red Sea : to him which overthrew Pharaoh and his host : to him which led his people through the wilderness : to him which smote great kings : and kings famous as

Sihon king of the Amorites : and Og king of Bashan." A wondrous idea this, of making history the basis and reason of grateful song ! Suppose we did this in our own experience ! How we should change the past, and blend in one sacred and thrilling sound the tolling knell, the wedding peal, the natal salutation, and all the strains and choruses that make up the massive melody of life's daily story.

A still tenderer strain comes into the song : "Who remembered us in our low estate" ; "Who giveth food to all flesh." The intellectual audacity of connecting praise for the heavens and the earth with praise for daily bread (food) is most suggestive and instructive. The heavens are infinitely beyond us, appealing mainly to an excited but chastened imagination, whilst our daily bread is a household mercy appreciated by the youngest and oldest member of the domestic circle. A grand idea this, to think of Jehovah smiting Egypt, dividing the Red Sea, and overthrowing famous kings, and connecting him with a tender memory of our low estate. "Let those refuse to sing who never knew our God." That is a fair challenge. "Servants of the heavenly King" must, by a gracious compulsion, let their voices be heard in private and in public song.

This is a beautiful and most

tender revelation of the personality and character of God. "Power belongeth unto the Lord, and unto the Lord belongeth also mercy." Never let us forget that there is a greatness of mercy as surely as there is a greatness of strength. The omnipotence of God is as surely seen in his pity as in his dominion of nature. We can always approach God along the line of his mercy. We dare not plead his righteousness; we dare not challenge his law; we dare not invite him to conference on equal terms: but we can all say, and say with complete effect, "God be merciful unto me a sinner."

"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh."—ROM. viii. 3.

The Revised Version says, "Wherein it was weak." That is precisely where philosophy stops, and precisely where the spiritual mystery begins. Science is quite right in recognising the limitations of law, but science may easily become the victim of its own word. The word "law" haunts the investigations of science as a refrain haunts many a merry song. It is unwise for the religious teacher to mock at "law," for there it certainly is, and the foot strikes

upon it again and again as it walks over the area supposed to be sacred to science. In this text Paul fixes the precise point where a new and larger scheme of the universe begins. He passes from "law" to "grace"; and the "grace" is not a sentiment, or a transient and good-natured emotion—it is neither more nor less than a person, and that person is none other than the Incarnate God. Thus the realm of what we, too narrowly, call "natural law," is not abolished, but is transcended. Where the custom of the house was insufficient to cover all circumstances, the master of the house arose and exercised a larger sovereignty. God has enlarged the names of individuals, he has enlarged the capacity of poets and painters, he has enlarged the development of plants and flowers, he has conducted a marvellous scheme of evolution in all departments of nature, and now he, so to say, exalts himself above all known and limited law, and creates a marvellous gospel, which proceeds from the very midst of his own heart. We might read the text thus: When the first law failed, a second and higher law was introduced. Everything turns thus upon the definition of the word "law." It is not impossible that there is but one law, and that the gospel, as revealed in Christ Jesus, is the consummation of its range

and purpose. Christians know nothing about two Gods, as, for example, the God of nature and the God of grace, the God of time and the God of eternity. The Lord our God is one Lord, whether in the daisy or in the constellation, whether in the insect or in the archangel. Continuity is only an aspect of unity.

There is a law of the "flesh," and there is also a law of the "spirit." That is precisely the meaning of the Apostle. There is a law of retrogression, of self-seeking, of short-sightedness, of base indulgence of the lower nature: that law will run itself out, and its slaves will perish in corruption. Is any man at liberty to say that the law of the "flesh" is the only law known to science or to social observation? The answer is an emphatic negative, for it is evident to all thoughtful persons that there is an infinitely superior law called the law of the spirit, the law of light, of intelligence, of love, of unselfishness, and that this law, being of the very nature of God himself, can neither sink into depravity nor bring itself to an untimely end. It is the law of growth, the law of harmony, the law of conscious and grateful union with God. "They that are in the flesh cannot please God." They are following a false light, and continually expending themselves in pursuits which lead to disappoint-

ment and shame. "To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." This is not a dogmatic or an official statement; it is daily experience interpreted to itself and put into plain words. It is for every man to say whether he will follow the lower law and bring himself into a blind alley, or whether he will follow the higher law and secure or his soul the liberty of the universe.

"What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet."—ROM. vii. 7.

"I had not known sin, but by the law." I had not recognised sin but by the law. The Apostle says in effect, I did not know the desire was covetousness, only the law so defined it. Without the law sin was dead. Sin is the transgression of the law. All this would seem to mean that if there were no law there would be no sin. But this is too narrow an interpretation of spiritual philosophy. It may apply to crime, but certainly it does not cover the whole ground indicated by the more spiritual word "sin." In

relation to an Act of Parliament obedience is one thing, but in relation to the Holy Ghost obedience is another. If there is no Act of Parliament—that is to say, no written human law, making drunkenness penal—then there is no drunkenness in the eye of the law—that is, of the law of man. But if man has omitted to make such a law, God has set up his own law on that form of moral offence. “No drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of heaven.” Always go to the higher magistracy. Human magistracy is but an imperfect aspect of divine sovereignty. When the property has been stolen the magistrate steps in and punishes the offence; but where the heart has secretly desired or coveted the property, the real sin has been committed in the esteem of God. Life is not lived outwardly, but inwardly. “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” This point must be pressed with great urgency, or the hearer will be uninstructed. Not what we are in the hand, but what we are in the heart is our real manhood. We may have written an elaborate creed with the hand, but in our heart we may be utter disbelievers. In this respect, as in all others, the doctrine of the text holds good, when that doctrine is largely and properly defined. A man may escape a charge of heterodoxy on the ground that in the Church to which he belongs

there is no law or creed defining theological orthodoxy; but the man who could take refuge in such a plea is a knave in his heart. On the other hand, a man may claim that he adheres strictly to every word of a written creed, and therefore he cannot be charged with unfaithfulness. This plea cannot be admitted. We may say, “Lord, Lord,” yet live far away from the spirit of obedience and loyal service. We may utter orthodox words and cultivate a heterodox spirit. Some persons seem to think that the only alternative is law or license; a written word or permission for the mind to take its own wanton course in relation to truth. The Apostle never meant to sanction such subterfuge. God has given his own law, and by that law every soul will be judged. Moreover, there is something in every soul that has been touched by the Divine Spirit, a wonderful faculty or power of distinguishing the true from the false. If so be the Spirit of God is reigning in the heart, that heart can have no difficulty in knowing false doctrine from true. In the whole of this seventh chapter to the Romans the Apostle is putting in contrast the law of the mind and the law of the flesh, the higher law and the lower law. He is not declaring some doctrine of innocence founded on the fallacy that where there is no written word there can be no spiritual

disobedience or disbelief. The Holy Spirit will take of the things that are Christ's and show them to the simple-minded inquirer. To as many as believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, to them will be given power to become the sons of God. If we really and truly, with profound and unfeigned sincerity, desire to know the mind of God upon any difficult subject, the Spirit will reveal that mind to us if such revelation be for our spiritual good. Never let us permit ourselves to be victimised by the casuistry that teaches that because no law has been given, of a written or formal kind, we are at liberty to invent our own religion or follow our own instincts. That is a very tempting and a very deadly delusion. Here the law applies, "Seek and ye shall find." In tender and prolonged prayer beseech God that he would tell you what is his mind and will, and if you fall into his hands for guidance be assured that the soul will not be permitted to lose itself in fatal darkness.

"Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye

shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them."—MATT. xxi. 2, 3.

A strange conjunction of words indeed is this—namely, "Lord" and "need." "Lord" indicates supremacy, authority, sway. Necessity is a beggar's word, not a lord's. But such is all life. Every man has his need, the highest as well as the lowest. Whosoever will come into human conditions, whosoever will socialise himself according to the laws of human organisation, whatsoever be his title, authority, supremacy, must, now and again, know the meaning of need. It is well it should be so: it equalises men; at certain points at least it excites and consolidates the truest sympathies of our nature; it opens opportunities for the least to serve the greatest; it enables the greatest to stoop with graceful condescension to accept an offering of the weakest and lowest. Things are much better distributed than we sometimes imagine. If a man be low and have next to nothing, what if he be not conscious of any capacity much beyond what he is? And if a man have fine sensibilities and great capacities, what if he, by the power and faithfulness of love, can turn a few loaves and one or two fishes into a great banquet? what if he carry with him this power of multiplication, which is always turning the little

into the great and causing the wilderness to blossom as a rose?

"The Lord hath need." There is but one Lord. That appears to be a very simple statement, easy of credence. It is one of the most difficult things in the world to believe that in the heart. Let a man have a conviction, intelligent, profound, unchangeable, that there is but one Lord, and his life becomes elevated: he has law, he has light, he has a throne in his life which is continually appealing to his loyalty and securing the services of his affection. There are lords many —nay, they are but lordlets! There is but one Lord, one God, one Lawgiver. Hear, O Israel! let thy worship be conducted and regulated by the announcement, "The Lord our God is one Lord," so there may be no debate about the direction of our worship, about the owner of our powers, about the redeemer of our souls. See how this operates in practical life. The disciples might naturally feel some little difficulty about going to take another man's property; so the Lord said unto them, "If any man say ought unto you, ye shall say the Lord hath need of them, and straightway he will send them." But suppose there had been a thousand lords, the question would have arisen, which of them? But there is one Lord, and his name is the key which opens every lock; his name

is the mighty power which beats down every mountain and every wall, and makes the rough places plain. What poetry there is here! Why, this is the very poetry of faith! It is not mere faith; it is faith in flower, faith in blossom, faith in victory! And straightway, immediately, without misgiving or hesitation, he will send them! This must have incurred a very great risk. No man likes to put himself into the hands of his inferiors in that way, except he be urged thereto by the assurance that stooping is rising. No man would like his servant to come back to him with his promise and assurance, and say, "They have been despised and broken; the man will not send what you have desired."

We never live sublimely till we live in the poetry of faith, till our faith becomes music and victory. This is the picture of a day which has yet to dawn upon the world. The time will come when a word will be enough; if the word be the right word, it need not be multiplied: its force is in its unity; its victory is in its intensity and concentration. Is this possible, that we shall have but to say to the poet, when he has his harp in fullest, sublimest tune, "The Lord hath need of thee," and at once he will begin the praise of Emmanuel? Is it possible that the time will come when we shall need to say to the

man of money but one word, "The Lord hath need of thy gold," and the coffers which have not seen the daylight for many a year will fly open at the utterance of that simple word?—when we shall have but to go to the young man of education and intellectual power and say, "The Lord hath need of thee," and instantly he will spring to the front and say, "Lord, speak, thy servant heareth"? Is it possible that the time can ever come when we shall have but to say to the daily newspaper, that last of the atheists, "The Lord hath need of thee," and we shall have less of the drama and the racing-ground and the billiard-table, and a little more at least of that which saves England from damnation and the highest life of the world from putrefaction? That will be the victory of victories !!

"All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass."—MATT. xxi. 4, 5.

The fulfilment of minute prophecies—not the fulfilment of sublime predictions, so called,

but the fulfilment of little, specific, minute, detailed prophecies. God does nothing unnecessarily, speaks nothing that seems exaggeration or superabundance. There is a meaning in the most delicate tint with which he hath varied any leaf; there is a significance in the tiniest drop of dew which ever sphered itself in beauty on the eyelids of the morning; and that Christ should go into Jerusalem upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass! That is not decorative talk; that is not mere flowery prophecy, or incidental or tributary foretelling. In all that we should account little and of inconsequent moment is fulfilled to the letter. What then? If God be careful of such crumbs of prophecy, such little detailed lines of prediction, what of the life of his children, the redeemed life of his Church? If not one tittle could fall to the ground respecting things of this kind—matters of order, arrangement, sequence—is he unrighteous to forget the greater, when he remembers the less? Will he count the hairs upon your head, and let the head itself be bruised? Will he paint the grass, and let the man fall to decay? Is he careful about birds floating in the air, and careless about lives redeemed by the sacrificial blood of his Son? The argument is an argument *à fortiori*. If he can do this for the little, what of the

great? If he can fulfil this testimony about the ass, and the colt the foal of an ass, and the particular method of going into a city, what will he do when he comes to the question of delivering the souls of his children from captivity, and saving the hearts of those who have put their trust in him? See, Christian reader and Christian sufferer, man often bent down to the dust by reason of heavy burdens, I find in this care about the minutest lines of prophecy an assurance by implication that they are infinitely safe who are in their Father's keeping.

"And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest."

—MATT. xxi. 8, 9.

What is your religion if it have no enthusiasm in it? Who wants a wooden Christianity or a logical Christianity only? Christianity loses its power when it loses its pathos. Every religion goes down-

ward when it loses the power of exciting the highest, most intelligent, and most courageous enthusiasm. Some of us have need to be cautioned against decorum. Alas! there are some Christian professors who do not know what it is to have a moment of transport and ecstasy, unutterable emotion,—who never, never go away upon the wings of light and hope, but are always standing, almost shivering, eating up their dry logic, and never knowing where the blossom, the poetry, and the ecstasy may be found.

Am I advocating nothing but emotion, sensibility, enthusiasm? Far from it. First of all, let there be intelligent apprehension and profound conviction respecting truth. Let us see that our foundations, theological and ethical, are deep, broad, immovable. Then let us carry up the building until it breaks out into glittering points, far-flashing pinnacles, and becomes broken into beauty. I like to see the young man capable of taking fire, and saying some things that cold critics would look upon very disparagingly. Always let me be understood as advocating, under all this, seriousness of conviction, clear apprehension of truth. Then as to the expression of that truth, I would allow you oftentimes the liberty some critics might consider license.

"And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves, and said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves."—MATT. xxi. 12, 13.

He is not carried away by popular enthusiasm. He does not live on popular applause. After all this he comes to what is right; the spirit of indignation burns within him when he sees any prostitution of sacred things. It is a perilous thing for some men to be applauded. Popular admiration is to some men a snare. Loud, resounding applause may upset their balance, destroy their equilibrium, and lead them to cater for the people who have applauded them. But Jesus Christ steps out of all this thunder, goes into the temple, and at once proceeds to destruction, assertion of right, and a vindication of great principle. What he might have done! He might have said, "Well, this temple will one day, and that day not far distant, be thrown down. I shall not interfere with this abuse now, because in the

natural order of things it will be overturned along with this structure." Jesus Christ did not know what it was to trifle so. I don't know that Jesus Christ knew the meaning of the word expediency as we sometimes prostitute it. He saw wrong. If that wrong would in five minutes work itself out, that was no consideration to him. Meanwhile, to him five minutes was eternity!

The wrong was not a cutaneous stain; it was an insult to God, a defiance of the Most High. We shall never get through life truly, grandly, worthily of our profession, till we take our stand upon simple right, and do it in God's spirit and in God's fear. They were sacred places, you say, to Jesus Christ. I believe there are men who could trifile with places which are known to most of us as sacred resorts. I have seen men who could come into church and walk halfway up the aisles with their hats on their heads. I have seen persons who felt themselves as perfectly at home—that is, as much at home as they could feel themselves anywhere—in a sanctuary as they would upon a public common. I do not urge a superstitious reverence for any place; but there ought to be a distinction between superstitious reverence and flippant off-handed treatment. Somewhere there ought to be sobriety, veneration, self-control.

This house is made holy, not by any form of words devised by man,—but the holy quiet, the holy hymn, the cry of prayer, the exposition of God's book, separates such places as these from the common world, and makes them emphatically houses of prayer. How this veneration is utilised will be seen in the very next verse:

"And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them."

See what his veneration was! He had just declared, "My house shall be called the house of prayer." The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. Prayer is not an exclusive term when the deepest needs of human nature are in question. Prayer is an inclusive term. It includes philanthropic service, educational service, missionary work, feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, showing the blind the right way, and breaking the bread of life to the hungry hearts of sinners.

"I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned;

for thou art the Lord my God."

—JER. xxxi. 18.

There are chastisements in life which cannot be classed amongst great afflictions. There are little checks, daily disappointments, irritations, defeats, and annoyances,—shadows which chequer what else would be a sunny way,—things which in themselves cannot be treated with dignity, yet they tease and wear the heart.

(1) Human life is established upon a disciplinary basis. There is a yoke everywhere—in sin, in repentance, in grace. No man can have everything just as he wants it. Man is made to feel that there is somebody in the world besides himself. He conceives a plan, and is laughed at for his pains; he tells his dream, and men suspect his vanity; he points out his high tower, and whilst his finger is lifted the mocking wind hurls the boasted masonry to the ground. So we are jostled, pulled back, and mortified. We are made to feel that our very life is a vapour, and that every respiration is but a compromise with death. We should ask ourselves the meaning of these things. Discipline touches the whole scheme: boy at school, going from home, bodily affliction, oversights and miscalculations, losses, etc.

(2) The value of discipline depends upon its right acceptance.

We may become desperate under it: "as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke." Men may mourn, complain, rebel; they start arguments against God; they justify themselves; they become lost in secondary agencies and incomplete details. Then, there is a better way: Ephraim bemoaned himself, repented before God, and said, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned." In this state of mind see (1) self-renunciation; (2) devout and joyful confidence in God's sovereignty and graciousness.

Application: (1) There is a yoke in sin. "The way of transgressors is hard." (2) There is a yoke in goodness. It is often difficult to be upright, noble, holy. God helps the true yoke-bearer: "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." We must bear a yoke—say, shall it be the bad yoke, or the yoke of Jesus Christ?

"In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion."—PSALM lxxi. 1.

Here we are dealing with an anonymous psalm; there are psalms which are too large in their sweep to need any special signature. They are like the fresh air or the sunshine, because they belong to everybody, and are their own best attestation. Other

psalms are interesting because they recall particular historical associations, which associations may cast light upon the doctrine and the experience of the various compositions. There are psalms that are the better for being seen in their exact local colour; there are other psalms which stand out best in the particular atmosphere of general history. This is a psalm which carries with it a verification as large as human experience.

It is not necessary to regard the composition as purely personal. Israel is not always an individual; often, indeed, he is a multitudinous unit. Israel was not only a man, he was a nation; so "man" himself may be either an individual or a race. Whether the psalm is personal or national, the groundwork of experience is the same. It is a groundwork of hope and trust and assured joy, under certain special realisations of divine providence. God guides the individual, and he also guides the nation. What is true in the one case is substantially true in the other.

The Psalmist gives his whole "trust" to God. Trust means confidence; confidence is but another word for faith. The Psalmist lives and moves and has his being in God. If left to himself he would come to "confusion," because he would mistake magnitudes, distances, proportions, and

relative values. He will not take his own affairs into his own hands, because no man can see even his own case in all its larger relations.

The Psalmist does not propose to save himself in any degree. Salvation is not a divided service. It is God who saves; it is man who responds to the divine will and method. The Psalmist makes no suggestion; he simply cries to be saved: "Lord save me, or I perish." The only part we can take in our salvation, in the first instance, is to cry mightily to God for mercy and rescue.

The Psalmist presents the divine Being to his imagination as a "strong habitation," as "a rock," as "a fortress." Experience will always suggest the best metaphors. God is always to the soul what the soul itself most requires. The Lord God is a sun and shield, a shepherd, a cliff, a "dwelling-place," whose hospitable doors stand continually open.

The Psalmist will not pit himself against his enemies. Let us learn a lesson from this fact. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper." Elisha stood still when he saw the Syrian armies, for he lived in God. If a man's ways please the Lord he

will make his enemies to be at peace with him.

In verse 7 the Psalmist uses a peculiar expression: "I am as a wonder unto many"; substitute the word "omen," or "portent," and you will come nearer the meaning which the Psalmist intended to convey. Driving the etymology down to dead literalism, it might be possible to read the verse thus: "I am as a monster unto many"; that is to say, the spiritual life cannot be understood by the carnal reason. A man having nothing to live upon but faith! A man clasping his hands and looking up into the cloudy heavens, and dumbly committing himself to an invisible God! What can be less rational? What can be more superstitious? Yet the just shall live by faith. We walk by faith, not by sight. Faith must always be a puzzle and a mystery to literal logic. Faith is the soul's highest self. The visible man is not the real man; nor is visible life the measure and the value of spiritual existence.

"The carnal mind is enmity against God." It cannot understand God. To the carnal mind God is an outrage upon reason, an inconceivable and immeasurable superstition. The Christian must defend his faith simply by living it.

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem,"—MATT. ii. 1.

Well, what then? Is the story concluded by the coming and going of Eastern sages, and the agitation of Herod the king? Is it quite a short story, to be read through in a few moments and to be classed with other anecdotes and transient events? On the contrary, let us accept these words as merely introductory, and let us fill up the chapter with the evolution of modern history as we ourselves have known and tested it.

(1) When Jesus was born in Bethlehem prophecy was fulfilled. All that the ancients had been struggling for and expecting in a supernatural direction had come to pass. Antiquity became a completed book. All the law and prophets ceased their ministration at the cradle of the new-born King. They had delivered their great message alike of instruction and prediction, and all their service had become a great golden gate closed for ever because the King had passed through and established His throne.

(2) When Jesus was born in Bethlehem superstition began to see new and true lights in the far horizon. It was so in the case of the Eastern dreamers and astrologers. Up to this moment they had lived in dreams

and fancies of their own, but yonder on the utmost line of vision there glittered a star which when rightly measured became the greatest sun in the firmament of history. Superstition is only contemptible when it ends in itself. Certainly it is to be appreciated and encouraged when it lives in the spirit of reverent expectation. The Eastern dreamers felt assured that beyond the clouds of their imagination there gleamed and burned innumerable centres of light. True religion expects more and more; false religion becomes a prejudice, obstinate and unprogressive.

(3) When Jesus was born in Bethlehem old and cruel despotsisms quaked in alarm and in helplessness. Herod represented the panic and distress of such tyrannies. He feared the unknown, the immeasurable, the spiritual. It seemed at once easy and impossible for him to subdue and even annihilate the new power. That new power was only a child; but whilst the cradle was common, and even mean, there was a mystery about the birth which excited the wildest alarm in the insecure throne. Who could tell what might be on the morrow? The hummingbird might madden and kill the eagle. The spark might be fanned into a flame that would drive all the darkness away for ever. It is the unknown quantity

that scares bad men and throws unworthy kings into a fever of apprehension.

(4) When Jesus was born in Bethlehem a new value became the right and the hope of every man in all the world. In the highest sense Jesus Christ created men in his own image and likeness. By the very fact that he regarded them as worth saving he lifted them up into individuality of importance and responsibility. Never forget that Jesus Christ creates the men whom he redeems; in other words, by redeeming them he creates them. Slaves become as kings. The heathen and the outcast are counted as servants of God.

(5) When Jesus was born in Bethlehem universal salvation became possible. Jesus Christ never asked the world to permit him to redeem it. The sun never asked to be created. The world is redeemed apart altogether from the relation which the world chooses to assume in reference to that redemption. One would think, from some representations of the gospel, that Jesus Christ begs and entreats men to allow him to redeem them. That is not the case. We live in a redeemed world. The sin of the world has been carried away by the Lamb of God. It is for us to say whether we will believe this and accept all the sequence and issue of our own faith. By

unbelief we can deprive ourselves of the blessing of redemption, as by building up every inlet of light we can deprive ourselves of the blessing of the sun. Though we shut out the sun, the world is still lighted by his glory. The position of the unbeliever, or the sinner, is that he rejects the redemption which has been wrought out by the incarnation of the priesthood of Christ.

Thus we may fill up the modern chapter regarding Bethlehem by tracing the condition of succeeding ages and centuries. We date our letters at Bethlehem. We go to Bethlehem for our law and our song. To Bethlehem we ascribe all the beneficence of the latest civilisation. Little Bethlehem thus expands itself until it becomes the very city of God.

"I indeed baptise you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire."—
MATT. iii. 11.

One of the first conditions of true power is to know one's limitations. Know what you can do and what you cannot do, and be content with the faculties with

which God has entrusted you. The bounds of our habitation are fixed; so are our talents; so are our spheres of influence; so are our ranges of ministry. John knew exactly what he had to do, and he kept strictly within the divine appointment. His was, indeed, an initial, or elementary, ministry, and yet God was pleased to make it a necessary part of his providential purpose. Men must work up to date, and people must be content to receive an up-to-date ministry, and their contentment need not be the less that they have an assurance that One mightier than the mightiest is coming with a deeper baptism. "I indeed baptise you with water," —that is what every true teacher says, qualifying his utterances by the special environment within which his ministry is exercised.

(1) This is what is said by the schoolmaster: "I indeed baptise you with letters, alphabets, grammars; but there cometh one after me, mightier than I, who shall baptise you with the true intellectual fire." The schoolmaster can do but little for a scholar, yet that little may be all-important. The schoolmaster teaches the alphabet, but the spirit maketh alive. There is a literary instinct. There is a spirit which can penetrate through the letter into the very sanctuary of the spiritual meaning. The schoolmaster has an initial work; the literary spirit

develops and completes what he could only begin.

(2) This is what ordinary experience says: "I indeed baptise you with water, with facts, with incidents, with the outside and transient apprehension of things; but there cometh one after me, mightier than I, the very spirit of wisdom and of a sound mind." Experience may make prudence a kind of calculation, but the spirit of wisdom makes it an instinct, a spiritual force, an unerring judgment. Experience may fill the life with anecdotes; but wisdom feeds the soul with true and far-sighted understanding. The fool may be brayed in a mortar and may come out as he went in; he may have seen a thousand experiences, but he has never known the power of the higher baptism, the baptism of purifying and enlightening fire.

(3) Christianity has always spoken the word of hope. It has always promised the "one mightier." Jesus Christ himself did this. John pointed to Jesus, and Jesus pointed to the Holy Ghost. The incarnate Son has disappeared from earthly eyes, but the Holy Ghost dwells in the heart and interprets the absent Christ. Christ is not displaced by the Holy Spirit; he is illumined and interpreted. Paul said, "Henceforth we know Christ no more after the flesh," which is literally true; but it is equally

true that we must for ever know Christ as the supreme spiritual power. We live in the age of the spirit. Things no longer come to us as appealing to the eyes or to any of the physical senses; they now come by way of spiritual suggestion, insight, sympathy, and self-sacrifice.

To be baptised with water is indeed a poor baptism. It does not belong to the innermost ministry of Christ; it is initial, elementary, beautifully significant, but only valuable as it points to something infinitely more potential and spiritual than it can ever be. Have we been baptised with the Holy Ghost? Have we received the baptism of fire? He that believeth and is baptised with the Holy Ghost as with fire sent down from heaven shall be saved. Let us accept the limitations of our ministry, and thus do the best we can for those who wait upon our teaching, and specially let us beware lest we consider our teaching final, and fail to point to the One mightier who brings with him the Eternal Spirit and the all-purifying fire.

"I had not known sin, but by." ROM. vii. 7.

"By," or "for," or "except." I had not known this but for that or by that, or unless something had occurred to give it definiteness

and application. One thing explains another. One thing seems to create another. It would seem to be emphatically so in the case of certain sins. Where there is no law there is no transgression, "Sin is the transgression of the law." We have a principle here of wide application to human history and experience. (1) I had not known the evil of sin but for its bitter consequences. (2) I had not known the deceitfulness of the human heart but by painful experience. (3) I had not known the sinfulness of sin but for the mercy of God. (4) I had not known the bounty of Jesus Christ but for the hunger which gnawed my heart. (5) I had not known the riches of friendship but for my need of sympathy and help. (6) I had not known the inspiration of the Bible but that it answered the deepest questions of my heart and gave me comfort which no other book even attempted to give.

Thus we come upon a long line of indebtedness. We had not known how noble human life could be but for its exemplification in some heroic man. We had not known how trouble could be borne but for the noble fortitude shown us by some suffering and triumphing friend. We had not known our capability in the matter of patience and love and sorrow but for the little child which Christ set in the midst of our

life. We had not known the love of God but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. We had not known the sacredness of the past but that we were able to carry back to it all the light of our latest study, experience, and discovery. Thus becomes true in a large and vital sense, "What thou knowest not now thou shalt

know hereafter." I had not known the sweetness of anticipating heaven but for my disappointment with time and earth and conflict. I know yesterday better because I know to-day so well. I had not known the beatitudes but for the commandments. I had not known the freedom of the gospel but for the bondage of sin.

AD CLERUM.

IF the Bible had not survived so many examinations, assaults, and afflictions, one might despair of its happy issue out of present-day inquiry and so-called dissection. What we want, however, and what we must have at all costs, is the truth. In pursuing this end Christian scholars must be prayerfully and generously supported. We may have to build other churches and other colleges, because, as honest men, we cannot accept a livelihood by betraying a trust; yet I believe we shall account the sacrifice a joy if by making it we can get nearer to reality and fact. If the discussion turned upon some particular doctrine contained in the Bible itself, a doctrine known to be open to various interpretations, the ground would be very significantly limited. But in this case the question turns upon the genuineness and credibility of the Bible itself, and I, for one, am sorry that our scholars and experts do not feel themselves at liberty to speak more definitely upon that vital subject. Theirs is largely a non-committal attitude upon nearly all the points of expert opinion. They offer us "a series of tentative suggestions," they refer us to "a true historical instinct," they are not able to say this or that "at present," they give "legitimate weight" to the results or possibilities of "future excavations," and they assure us that all is right as to spiritual revelation. Adam, as he has been popularly apprehended, was removed from the Bible long ago by

the naturalists. There is no Adam ; there never was any Adam. There never could have been any Adam. The account of the Creation is a Poem, but who wrote it no man knows ; Adam could not have written it for there never was an Adam. What we want to get at is fact, rise or fall what may. The front gates are fired down, the castle guns have been silenced, the moat has been crossed, the roof has been battered in, but the household hearth still remains ! Does it ? How long will it remain ? All along the critical line orthodoxy has had to give in. Even " poor Tom Paine " is now seen to have been something of a hero and a pioneer, and, in fact, almost a martyr. All this may be right, or it may all be wrong ; what I fear is that where criticism has so completely beaten back orthodoxy it may one day drive in the battle upon Calvary itself and seize the cross as a trophy of war. It is easy to deprecate this view, and easy to pity it as sentiment, yet I cannot sufficiently ignore the antecedent facts to treat it with disregard. If ninety-nine of a hundred points have been carried, I cannot feel quite secure about the hundredth. But some of the men who have made the bulk of these concessions are Christian men ? Truly. They are, too, men who do more for mankind than it lies within my inferior capacity to do. I know that I am not dealing with aliens and enemies. That is my supreme difficulty. I feel that if such men are right, I must be wrong. I was preaching in some blundering way before they were born, but they come up with all the new learning, and they take away, or permit to be taken away, Adam and Abraham, and David and Isaiah and Daniel, in the sense in which I have always cherished these illustrious names. They drive Christ out of the Messianic Psalms and prophecies. They tell me that the Bible is wrong in history, wrong in chronology,

wrong in dates, wrong in sequence, and that "as a treatise on ethics, or a *Vade Mecum* of practical conduct, the book does not profess to serve." But they assure me that the whole purpose of the book is to bring men to Christ. Whose Christ? Baur's? Strauss'? Renan's? Presently may they take away my Lord himself without telling me where they have laid him?

In substance I retain the Bible exactly as my mother gave it, for she, too, was an expert. She thought the Lord made the heavens and the earth in six days and that he rested on the seventh day and blessed it. She told me the story of Joseph just as if it had been all true, and she told me about Abraham and Isaac and the angel seizing the uplifted knife as if it was a fact. And about the flood she told me, and never for a moment doubted the great rain, but was quite sure that the flood was forty days upon the earth, and that the waters prevailed upon the earth, and that all the high hills that were under the whole heavens were covered. She went over all the Bible lovingly, and never said a word to me about "tentative suggestions," clay tablets, and "future excavations." And many a time after reading the Bible to me we fell on our knees and the dear old soul talked to God as if he were a real living being and quite close to her. Yet she knew nothing about God but what she had read in the Bible! Of course all this cuts a mean figure in the eyes of formal logic and in the view of the new learning. Yet I am going to cling to it. My reason for referring to it now is to remind the critics that there is a Bible dear to the common people, they were made by it, converted by it, comforted by it, and they live upon it, and I do not want the critics to take it away until they have something better to give than "a series of tentative su-

gestions," and the hope of finding some help in "future excavations." We must not ignore the work which the Bible has done amongst the people. Experts should limit the circulation of their books amongst themselves. They should prey and feed and starve upon each other's partial learning, and flatter each other's critical instinct by inventing still longer polysyllables and playing the middleman to German wordmongers. I would only take away an idolator's idol because I think I have something better to put in its place. Neither would I take away the mother's Adam and Moses and Abraham and Isaac and Isaiah and Daniel, and fill the ghastly vacancy with "nothing more than a series of tentative suggestions." But what would the infidel say? I never consult the infidel upon anything. I go to the infidel for infidelity; I never go to him for faith. What, then, is to be done? Go on with the old until the new is ready. Do not let the soul shiver in nakedness whilst the new tailors are wrangling over the texture and pattern of the new clothes. What about the suggestion that the Bible is the composition and the imposture of the monks of the twelfth century? It is the most self-stultifying theory ever dreamed by insanity if only for the reason that there is no book in the world of which the monks are so much afraid as the Bible, and no book which they have so strenuously endeavoured to keep out of the hands of the people. If they invented it they were so God-forsaken as to invent an engine for their own destruction. No layman can harbour both the Bible and the monk. Then what of the rationalistic theory which picks and chooses, and blows away the ghostly or supernatural element? A most inadequate and a most irrational theory. Rationalism offends nothing so much as reason. Every man who knows himself knows that there is a point at which reason

must terminate its explanations and solutions, and be dissatisfied by a half-illumined universe, or rise into imagination, or find light and rest in faith. The only right which any man has to be a rationalist is the right which he has to starve himself,—and has any man the right of self-starvation? I do not hesitate to say that the difference between Unitarian and orthodox conceptions should not be so faint as hardly to be distinguishable; nor should a teacher's evangelicalism depend upon an occasional sentence here and there: the distinction should be vital, glaring, palpable, eternal. I, therefore, utterly repudiate the so-called rationalistic conception of inspiration. What, then, is my personal standpoint, my individual and peace-bringing faith? I will try to make it clear.

At the outset I feel sure that the Bible was written, edited, put together, and otherwise made into a book by somebody. The sun and moon may have made themselves or may be due to anonymous origin, but it is certain that some man or men wrote the Bible, and some other man or men printed it, published it, and brought it within our reach. It is something to know beyond doubt that the Bible had a personal origin. But it might have a personal origin and be a bad book. Exactly. But we know that it is not a bad book. Even some schools of rationalism admit that the book has moral merits. Certainly it is a most religious book. Its keyword, as we have seen, is *God*. That must be most clearly recognised. When creation is accounted for, where is God put? In the very first sentence. When man is accounted for, where is God put? In the very first sentence. When the Law is given, where is God put? In the very first sentence. When the prophets were called, where is God put? In the very first sentence. When

Jesus began to preach, where was God put? In the very first sentence. When Jesus Christ rose from the dead, to whom was he about to ascend? To "My God and my Father." When Jesus shall end his mediation, who shall reign? "God shall be all in all." When Jesus shall come again, how will he come? "With the trump of God." From whom is the new Jerusalem to descend? "I, John, saw the new Jerusalem coming down from God." Before whom did the four-and-twenty elders fall down in heaven? They fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne. Who promised the seed of the woman? God. Who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son? God. Who shall destroy the last trace of sorrow? "God shall wipe away all tears." So rolls the thunder-music. God! God! God! I simply note the fact, and I especially note it because it is one of those facts which do not terminate in themselves. Whenever God comes, he comes with thousands of angels and chariots innumerable. When God comes, Creation comes, and Providence, and Redemption. Finding as I do so much implied by the introduction of the divine Name—implied I say, not expressed or claimed in any formal way as in a legal document—I at once, and necessarily, think of the book in vital connection with that all-including Name. In a very clear and intelligible sense, the Name is to me the book and the book is the Name. I hardly so much as see the human names: they are the names of clerks, scribes, secretaries, or amanuenses; I am interested in them only in a very secondary and remote way. Why? Because the other Name fills all the space and becomes the focal point of all attention. It would not surprise me if the writers themselves were to tell me that they were very slow and laborious penmen, and that often they did not know what they were writing. The prophecy

may have been greater than the prophet. Jeremiah himself, not the least of the prophets, may have shrunk into a child when the heavenly charge sought to enter into his soul, and Moses never really knew how much he hesitated and stammered until God called him to service. Then the hesitancy was felt. These high elections magnify our estimate of personal infirmity. We chaffer on equal terms with Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, but when the Voice out of the whirlwind thrills us, we abhor ourselves in dust and ashes. It is that Voice which I hear most distinctly in the Bible. That Voice is, indeed, the Bible. Without that Voice there would be no Bible. I therefore call the Bible the Word of God, and if I called it by any other name I should be as one who was busy here and there and who let the King pass by. It is more than possible to think too much about the scribes and the amanuenses, and to think too little about what is actually written. We have turned the amanuenses into authors, and loaded them unjustly with responsibility. Sometimes we should pity them. Surely it was not easy to bear "the burden" of the Lord. I thank the men through whom the message came, but I must not forget that my business is with the message itself. If I were to offer homage to the angel who brings me "the sayings of the prophecy," he would say, "See thou do it not; for I am thy fellow-servant and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God." If when I read the wonderful words of Peter, I were to fall down at his feet and worship him, he would take me up and say, "Stand up, I myself also am a man." If I were to think only or largely of Moses and Ezra and Isaiah, this same Peter would rebuke me, saying, "The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy

Ghost." And the prophets themselves would rebuke our criticism and our admiration, saying, "Why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us as though by our own power or holiness we had brought you this message?" They would refer us to the true Source: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God." In the New Testament as well as the Old the reference is always to God: "We are labourers together with God. . . Written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God. These things saith the Son of God. It is God which worketh in you. I was made a minister according to the gift of the grace of God. I am made a minister according to the dispensation of God. In the sight of God speak we in Christ." Thus, not "in a few scattered texts," but uniformly and passionately we are referred to God. Prophets and apostles ask no recognition, they constantly point us to God. The dominant and unchanging tone of the Bible is God. This is my reason for thinking and speaking of the Bible as the Word of God.

This gives me the right point of approach to the Bible and all its contents. All the detail I can now survey from a true elevation. So long as I mistook the telegraph messenger for the telegram itself, I was in great confusion. Who was he? Who were his parents? What was his age? How did he come to be connected with a great electrical system? I made a puzzle of him. Was he old enough to have written a telegram? Had he and another boy concocted the telegram? After all, was the missive a telegram? If it was a telegram, why was it not sent immediately to me without the intervention of a messenger? And if a messenger had to come, why almost insult me by sending a boy,—quite a child, in fact? I asked the

boy if he had written the telegram, and he said "No." I demanded to see the clerk who had pencilled down the message, and he turned out to be little more than a boy himself; but he had sufficient sense to suggest that I had better open the envelope and read the message. When I read it, the boy and the clerk became of small consequence to me. The message was full of love. It was the message for which I had been waiting many a weary day. I could have loved even the boy who brought it to me. I had at length looked at the whole action from the right point of view, and now the shadows were dispersed by the full shining of the light. The right point of view is exactly what we want in everything. The theodolite itself may be in perfect condition, yet the triangulation will be bungled if it is not set upon the right spot and at the right height. The mere setting up of the theodolite was, we are told by the surveyors, one of the most difficult operations in carrying out the trigonometrical survey of the country; sometimes a scaffold had to be built up to a great height, the surveyors say that they had sometimes to build a solid foundation for it in the middle of a bog, and sometimes it had to be carried to the very summit of a rocky mountain. So in our looking out upon wider spaces, we must not only have a well-adjusted theodolite, we must find the elevation on which the instrument must stand, even if that elevation has to be built or attained at the greatest cost. Then must follow the three specific adjustments of the instrument, any one of which being wanting or incorrect, triangulation is impossible. It seems to me that the higher critics have not always placed themselves at the right point of view in attempting to survey the almost boundless field of inspiration. They are, in some conspicuous instances, mere word-grubbers, who cannot find through grammars and lexicons what

can only be found by incessant and sympathetic communion with God. Expertness may be the fruit of prayer. If I start my survey of the Bible from any other point than God, I am lost in details. The Author, not the Book, in its mechanical form, is the point to begin at. This is markedly so in the New Testament as well as in the Old. We must first know the dominating Personality of the book. That Personality is Jesus Christ. The Worker, not the works, must first be studied. It is beautiful that the New Testament begins with the genealogy of the Man. God had no genealogy, so he plunges at once into the act of revelation by creation. Jesus comes to us by every human genealogy, and all the genealogies vary even up to the point of perplexity and contradiction, yet they are reconciled in the root, forasmuch as they trace the incarnation of the Son of man. Jesus is every man's ancestor and every man's descendant. The root is in every twig, and every twig is in the root. Buddha is in the genealogy, and the woman who was a sinner, and the man who murdered his brother, and the saint almost wholly white, and Judas Iscariot who betrayed Innocence with a kiss, forasmuch as this Coming One was the Son of man. "The Son of man"! That is his genealogy in three syllables. It reaches beyond the time-line, for he who is thus the Son of man is of necessity the Son of God, and he who is thus the Son of God is to me, and to unnumbered millions, God the Son! Thus, in surveying the New Testament, I think I place the theodolite on the true base. And thus the miracles fall into their right position and yield their mystery in response to faith. It was only when I approached the miracles from the wrong point that they staggered my inexperience. I talked of nature, and laws of nature, and the order of the universe, and continuity, until I settled into that kind of wonder the

lower side of which looks towards unbelief. But all was changed when I approached the miracles from the point of long and deep communion with Christ. The miracles were but the dust of his feet. They ceased to be miracles ; they were syllables in one great speech of love. In the first instance I struggled up to them through the weakness and gloom of fear : in the second I descended upon them in the strength and glory of faith. Then I understood how he came to make so little of miracles and so much of holiness, and then there shone upon me the meaning of his promise that the glory of his miracles should be eclipsed by the "greater works" which he would do through his disciples when he worked from the height of the heavens.

It is important to remember that inspiration and revelation are not one and the same thing. Probably there cannot be revelation without inspiration, but there may be inspiration without revelation. It may be proper to define revelation as including such truths and facts as are not discoverable by human reason—say, for example, the Personality and the attributes of the Godhead. But inspiration may guide the mind into all truth :—into a right construction of history, into a right grouping and colouring of the facts of life, into the right use of the moral sense ; in short, into a true knowledge of all things pertaining to the whole culture of the soul. A man may be inspired to carve a statue, or paint a picture, or compose a poem, yet have no revelation of the living and gracious God. A right conception of this difference might simplify and re-adjust some theological controversies.

Am I expected, then, to receive from so small a people as the Jews so great a gift as a Book which is regarded by

Christendom as the vehicle of a divine revelation? Am I in any prescriptive degree whatever to be bound by that Book? Why not go to the Greek, the Roman, or the Indian mind for my revelation? Is not the word "Jews" itself a stumbling-block? Why not collate all revelations, dreams, visions, and aspirations, and get out of them a common revelation? Surely one might naturally resent the thought of Englishmen, and men of all other nationalities, being driven to Palestine to learn from misbehaving, cruel, lying, selfish Jews who God is, and what he is, and what he wants. Is not this to enter, if entering at all, into the sanctuary of revelation by some ill-kept postern gate, rather than through the portals of a federal and representative humanity? I have no difficulty as to my reply. I might argue that the Jew in this relation was more than a Jew; that from beginning to end there is not in the Bible a shadow of suggestion that the revelation was a message to the Jew alone; and that infinitely beyond all other sacred books the Bible is pervaded and penetrated by what I may call the spirit of universality. When it begins there are no Jews, when it ends there are no Gentiles; for at the end the whole earth is as a rose in the garden of God. But I have a larger answer. I am already committed to the Jews by an infinite obligation. From the Jews I have accepted the Christ. "Salvation is of the Jews." This acceptance determines everything. I am not ashamed to receive the Writing where I received the Life.

As to some of the Biblical books being supposedly less inspired than others, such as Esther, Daniel, Ecclesiastes, and Jonah, the case is not proved; but if proved, the issue would be of limited importance. In the matter of gradation, or degree, or other obscure variety, the

construction of the Bible is most remarkable. In some cases the personality of the prophet goes far much, as Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel ; in others, the prophet is lost in the prophecy. Who knows anything of Obadiah ? or Joel ? Who knows precisely when Amos took up his work, except that it was two years before the earthquake ? Of Amos and his junior Hosea we know some interesting particulars ; but who knows anything of Micah, whose father's name is unknown, and whose birthplace owes its fame to his own prophecy ; yet Micah spake of justice and mercy and the humble walk with God. The minor prophets had their share of inspiration. Inspiration is not a mechanical term. The great and the small are the Lord's. Daniel is not necessarily uninspired because his mysterious pages are apocalyptic rather than prophetic. Jonah represents an inspired conception of life and duty, however much we may be perplexed by its central difficulty. Inspiration touches the highest and lowest grades of faculty.

There is a common inspiration, as well as an inspiration that is unique. "There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding." The Church is entitled to claim this inspiration in reading the Bible. Some parts of the Bible are personal and local, and in that degree they may have been allowed to fall into desuetude. The site of "the valley of craftsmen" is of no importance to us. We do not deny the existence of a country because some of its mountain heights are inaccessible. Many of us are compelled to do with the Bible as we do with a country : some valleys are fruitful ; some rocks are barren. My pastoral advice to inquirers is founded upon the example of Christ. When he was asked great questions, he referred the

inquirers to the law, the commandments, the prophets. This is what his ministers must do. He never referred to the difficulties of the Old Testament, but to its gospels. The valley of Megiddon may have been blotted out: the garden of Gethsemane is the one road to forgiveness.

The forces which are now antagonising the Bible as it has been heretofore largely regarded, are the strongest that civilisation can muster. Within the Church are the higher critics who have challenged the authorships, the dates, the chronologies, and many of the earlier moralities, and have turned not a few of the ancient leaders and examples into "eponymous heroes," and some of whom have not hesitated to lower the Apostle Paul. Outside the Church are the agnostics, many of them men of the highest intellectual eminence, who attack the higher critics just as severely as the higher critics attack certain portions of the Bible, and "boldly challenge" them to prove the Supernatural and demonstrate the Divine. The greater havoc some of the higher critics make in the structural parts of the Bible, the more vehemently they exalt the supernatural; but the worship of the supernatural is mocked by the agnostics as an infatuated superstition,—and the agnostics have no reason to be ashamed of the intellectual force and dignity ranged on their side. Even agnostics have passed through universities, and, having done so, they smile at the idea of revelation and worship. They have won all along the line of the higher criticism, who can say that they will not further push their triumphs until they beat down and quench every shrine and altar and upper light? They have no reason to be disheartened. In documentary religion they have wrought great havoc, why may they not work equal havoc in spiritual religion? To smile at

the suggestion is not to answer it. Once men smiled at the attacks made upon the mechanical and verbal Bible ; but the attacks are no longer regarded as futile or abortive. The pedants cannot help us, but the people can,—they represent the great common heart of the world ; and it is to that heart the Christ has always appealed. My hope is in the common heart with all its sin and sorrow, its pain and need, its tragedy and self-despair ; in that shattered, grief-stricken heart—in that mean Bethlehem—the child-Saviour will be born age by age while time endures. The Incarnation stands between the natural and the supernatural and lays its wounded hands upon both. It is the hope of the world. It is the Infinite Salvation. But how can war be waged with success against the ever-gathering and overpowering forces of criticism, agnosticism, unbelief, and moral aversion ? Modern culture, narrowly interpreted, has not greatly aided the war ; nor has Science as represented by her highest English names ; there is only one hope, and that hope is the Living Christ working amongst the common people. We must get back to Bethlehem, back to Galilee, back to Calvary. We must take Christ's standpoint in everything : even in relation to Moses and the prophets, and the Psalms, and "all the Scriptures." Literal errors have no doubt crept into manuscripts, translations, and versions ; this has been frankly admitted by the most competent orthodox critics ; yet I venture to think that such critics are right when they counsel a policy of caution and patience, as against a policy of Critical Young-Englandism which may occasionally disguise its cruelty under an ambiguous civility, and which may now and then be tempted to mistake its self-complacency as the newest vehicle of inspiration.

Writing solely from a preacher's standpoint, I have no

doubt that the common people do with the Bible as to its structural framework exactly what they do with its most mysterious teaching—they wisely leave it until they are better fitted to grapple with the difficulty. Whoever really enters into the spiritual Church enters it by what may be called the gate of Mystery. It must not be imagined that the mechanical or strictly literal part of the Bible is either the only difficulty or the greatest difficulty. Probably it is the least, and the least to be accounted of, notwithstanding the excitement of the higher critics. I have never known any one unite livingly and sympathetically with the Christian congregation on the ground that he intellectually comprehended the orthodox conception of the constitution of the Godhead. As a pastor I have thought it wise to encourage the soul to feed upon the Saviour, and to leave all difficulties, literal and metaphysical, for deferred consideration and adjustment. Nor is this an official advice adopted to meet a theological necessity. It is the approved policy of all life and progress ; without it, life would come to a dead stop. I do not know how much, if anything, Christ owes to those who come to his cross along the critical, the academic, or the purely intellectual line. I will not judge, lest I wrong a rationalism in which I have no faith. May not literal errors be removed ? Certainly ; but do not magnify their importance. Is it not desirable to have absolutely accurate history ? Certainly ; but not nearly so literally important as some persons would make it out to be. The real history may be in the central line, and not in the local placing and shading. We may need a new way of reading history. For my own part, I can read the Bible without being troubled by any consciousness of discrepancy, or any deficiency in the dating and signing of the several books. Perhaps some day a

word, one little word, may explain much. I am willing to wait. I have enough for the present. I have all eternity to work in. But ought not scholars to be encouraged to prosecute their critical studies? Certainly; and they ought to be encouraged to refrain from publication until they have something better to offer than "merely a series of tentative suggestions." It might be useful for them to issue a one-sentence report to the effect that they were steadily at work, and that until they had definite conclusions to announce the Church would do well to keep on reading the Bible. I believe the Church will do this, whatever bulletins may be issued from the mines of criticism.

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